

**Speech by Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma  
“More or less Europe?”**

**Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels  
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I am delighted to be here.

I would like to thank the Centre for European Policy Studies for organising today’s “ideas lab”, and for inviting me to open the debate.

The high-profile line up for today’s event is the recognition of the Centre’s reputation as a source of fresh thinking and policy innovation.

But equally importantly, it speaks to the relevance of today’s question.

Ladies and gentlemen,

‘More or less Europe?’ is a debate that has been with the EU since its formation.

And the answer to the question - which will be no surprise to anyone in this room - is not a simple one.

Because in parallel we must ask: where, what and why. Where do we need more or less Europe? What do we need? And why do we need it?

Over the next two days, you will have the opportunity to explore these questions in depth with political and academic leaders.

I would like to outline three dynamics at play in 2015.

The first is the international environment. The world is increasingly interconnected, fast-moving and unpredictable. The opportunities and threats we face are constantly evolving.

We can see this in Ukraine or Libya, or in the terrorist attacks in Paris. There is an ongoing struggle in Syria and Iraq. We see volatility of currency markets and commodity prices. We experience the emergence of ever more complex economic systems and increasing migratory pressure from North Africa and the Balkans.

But we also see new opportunities created by advances in technology and transport, access to education, medicine and the spread of innovation. The result of which is the emergence of new markets and economic actors on the global scene. All of which can be a source for a better life for all.

Second is the social dynamic or ‘social contract’. Europeans look to their governments and to the EU to create jobs, generate wealth, and provide security.

Yet at the same time, the state’s ability to deliver is limited by two economic realities: lower growth, which affects spending; and the globalized nature of the world economy, which requires nation-states to respond rapidly to international developments.

And third, there is the political dynamic – in other words, the evolving political landscape and changes in public attitudes towards governance bodies. This has manifested itself in numerous ways and created a complex picture across Member States, with significant variation in political trends, voter engagement and support for the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These international, social and political dynamics are fuelled by a vast range of drivers, from domestic political pressures to macroeconomic dynamics.

They are creating new economic, security and geopolitical challenges. And it is up to Europe to adapt and respond.

So how do we determine whether and where we need ‘more or less’ Europe?

I believe in a pragmatic approach.

Rooted in the principles of subsidiarity, conferral and proportionality, as set down in the Treaties.

Mindful that the risks of going it alone are often greater than the challenges of integration.

And with a hard-headed focus on delivering economic, security and social benefits to European citizens.

If you ask the ordinary European if they would like more or less Europe, they will probably not quote Article 5 of the Treaty on the principle of subsidiarity!

Instead they are more likely to express an interest in jobs and prosperity, safe communities, or opportunities to study and travel.

It is less relevant if the result is achieved through policies at the EU or national level.

So we need a formula that promotes these interests and objectives. In other words, it’s not about more Europe or less Europe, but making sure we have the right policies in place to build a better Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is this thinking which shaped the agenda for our Presidency of the Council.

And why our three themes – competitive, digital and engaged Europe – are built around delivering real benefits for ordinary Europeans.

Competitive, by focusing on jobs, growth and investment.

Digital, to help businesses and consumers, and transform Europe into the world's leading knowledge-based economy.

And engaged in the world, to deliver security and prosperity for Europe and our neighbours.

At the core of these priorities, I believe, is the desire to further the welfare of Europeans.

Two months into our Presidency, we are seeing progress on this programme.

We have taken forward work to establish a European Fund for Strategic Investments. We have advanced the Energy Union through the so called 'Riga Process'.

We have agreed new counter-terrorism measures and initiated a review of the European Security Strategy, to make it fit for purpose in 2015.

And we have laid the foundations for the Eastern Partnership Summit in May – a framework that has acquired a new strategic significance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Yet already in the first two months Europe has experienced extraordinary events. In Paris, Ukraine and Greece.

These developments have given rise to challenges, where there are no easy solutions.

Yet as we work through them, we must strive to maintain unity, prove our resolve and demonstrate flexibility.

I began by talking about international, social and political dynamics.

I am realistic enough to accept that the deliberative nature of EU negotiations among twenty-eight Member States makes it difficult for us to keep pace with such dynamic developments. But, not impossible.

I am also optimistic that, by sticking to a few pragmatic principles, and by focusing on the things that matter to Europeans the most, we can get the balance right.

Thank you and thanks once again to the Centre for European Policy Studies for organising this event.

I wish you all productive, creative and fruitful two days in, so it means to step out of the box and look beyond framework. I do believe in future of Europe and I certainly believe in Europeans.