

INFORMATION FOR MEDIA

Address by Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma at the NGOs' Forum in the Castle of Light March 3, 2015

Distinguished representatives of NGOs and opinion leaders from all over Europe,

Next week, on March 16, we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the famous Latvian poet, and today we would say an opinion leader - Aspazija. The period of the first independent state of Latvia from 1918-1940 was unimaginable without her opinion. Not always Aspazija's words were convenient for the public. Aspazija and her spouse – a world scale poet and philosopher Rainis, who will also celebrate the 150th anniversary this year, expressed freely minded opinions in both poetry and writing.

I will take the liberty of saying that their views contained positive criticism and the spirit of continuous incitement. Aspazija was convinced that there is an artist in every person, and life is the substance that he or she has to shape; thereby it is possible to build something bigger, more beautiful and always new. It is an idea expressed in human, simple and beautiful language that, in this 21st century, applies to all of us – both the governments of European countries, non-governmental organizations and each individual citizen.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This idea of continuous renewal of life applies to each individual person and to all of us – the European society as a whole.

At present, the economic and security situation in Europe is very different than it was a year ago and, of course, different than a century ago. It's time for the European community to amalgamate again. It's time for the European idea to regenerate, reborn. No matter how paradoxical it may be, it is easier for a man and communities to summon up all their strength for such self-renewal process when they face a risk or danger.

It is probable that Europe is at risk of being divided again. It is possible that the territory of European values is at risk of being narrowed; the inhabitants' opportunities in implementing these values in daily lives can be extinguished in specific points in Europe. These are the risks that make us vigilant, make us unite, achieve spiritual common denominator and also practical implementation in our lives.

I call on everyone – NGOs, the government, the members of the parliament to be the guardians of the EU values – democracy, the rule of law, human rights, at a time when populism is growing in Europe, when in some corners, there is a tendency to abandon liberal democracy and certain embarrassment dominates in a part of society.

This is particularly important this year when many EU countries hold elections, and voice of NGOs and opinion leaders is extremely important. In a broader area of Europe – Ukraine, Russia, we see a violent attack on these values, and discretion for such an act is not and will not be possible.

Today, the democratic world bids farewell to the Russian opinion leader Boris Nemtsov. He was a brave man who risked the most sacred – his life. In this moment of great sadness his passing away should gain sense. We can all commit ourselves to helping defend democracy, freedom and human rights. It would be our mission and carrying out Nemtsov's mission in the future. I call on everyone present to hold a moment of silence in honour of Boris Nemtsov.

At the same time, in the European Union, we have to remind ourselves of our duty towards the democratic spirit. Within the European Union we need to listen more to each other, to understand each other's problems. For example, Italians, Latvians and Spanish. In this area, the NGOs can do a lot because there are no political and economic interests, but rather shared European values, which we must defend. If we are unable to defend our values, we cannot expect our political and economic development.

Where to draw inspiration from? Citizens want to hear from their Heads of State a vision for country's development; the entrepreneurs wish to get predictable and inspirational appeals from politicians, and non-governmental organizations also needed inspiration and impetus for work that encourages the public to stay awake, to avoid becoming consumed by apathy or daily satisfaction.

Here a positive vicious circle occurs that confirms – we are able to inspire one another to positive examples, we are able to assure each other that, collectively speaking, we can find a common denominator for building the future of Europe, each our national state, our city, our homes. We are not and cannot be separated from one another.

Dear participants,

I would like to mention the constructive cooperation between the government and non-governmental organizations in Latvia. Ten years ago we established the NGOs' memorandum, which aims to promote public participation in government decision-making. At present, more than 360 NGOs have signed the Memorandum. Organizations participate in drafting the Action Plan of the government and the state budget. The number of advisory councils of ministries and NGO's representatives in councils has increased, as well as the number of draft legal acts and policy planning documents, which have been discussed in advisory councils.

I do believe that a ministry and civil servants alone cannot develop a high quality regulatory act; the involvement of NGOs is absolutely necessary.

In conclusion, I would like to call on everyone – let us go ahead, let's follow our purpose and create partners and a common denominator in Europe, as well as in a wider world. We all on this starting line have the opportunity to build our lives and our society, our Europe anew, ever better, mighty based on values of humanity and development.

Prime Minister of the Republic of Latvia
Laimdota Straujuma