



## News

### **Welcoming speech in the opening event of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

**08.01.2015**

Your excellences, Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Riga, the capital of Latvia, which has changed its title of the European Capital of Culture to the title of the capital of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union!

Unfortunately, this evening is overshadowed by the barbaric act of terrorism committed yesterday in Paris. We pay our tribute to the French people and express our condolences and sorrow to the families of those killed. I call for a moment of silence to honour their memory.

The opening event of the Latvian Presidency takes place tonight in the Latvian National Opera House that is our White House. Culture and especially opera traditions have great power in Latvia, therefore it is not a coincidence that we open that act of hard work right here – in the heart of Riga, where crucial historical events of great importance for country and people had taken place.

Tonight we will have an excellent opportunity to enjoy world-class compositions performed by highly professional artists, and it is not surprising, because Latvia is well known for its musical achievements and outstanding musicians all around the world.

Latvia has passed a substantial and significant path of development and growth during twenty-five years of its independence, successfully joining the European Union and other international organizations. Today Latvia is a safe, independent, and strong country that assumes the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the next six months. We have been preparing for this entrusted obligation very thoroughly. Trust that we receive today, when taking over the Presidency from Italy, is a clear acknowledgment of Latvian accomplishment.

What is the modern-day European Union? It does not consist of just six countries that united being driven by economic objectives in 1957. During 57 years of existence, the EU has turned into a union of 28 countries that actually means much more and where peace reigns. Indeed, what could be more important than peace during these troubled times full of challenges? Therefore, our duty is to be accountable for all and every decision and step of ours, thus contributing to the peace processes in the world with might and main. We do not live in an isolated space, because the world is open and increasingly interconnected. Strength of the European Union lies in our unity and diversity. Europe is known to the world in this way and in this way Latvia sees Europe during its presidency and afterwards as well. We have achieved much, but we must progress much faster towards ever-closer cooperation among the Member States of the European Union so that Europe becomes more competitive, modern, and stronger internationally.

The stronger the European Union becomes economically, the greater our influence will be internationally. The more long-sighted we are, the more allies we will gain and expand our circle of partners far beyond the borders of Europe.

As the Member State of the European Union, we have highlighted the Eastern Partnership and expansion of cooperation with the Central Asian region as priorities of our foreign policy, thus providing our contribution to faster growth of the European Union. Latvia has progressed towards that goal persistently, and Latvia is pleased with the progress already made.

I would like to thank the honoured guests of this evening: the President of the European Council Donald Tusk, the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, the College of Commissioners, Heads of Parliaments, entire political representation of Latvia and the European Union, as well as entrepreneurs, mass media representatives, and all and every present person, who shares this outstanding event with Latvia. I am convinced that Latvia will conduct a successful presidency and pass it over to Luxembourg. I wish an active and successful New 2015 Year to all of us!