

## **Address by Prime Minister Evika Siliņa on Europe Day**

Dear friends and like-minded colleagues,

Tomorrow, we celebrate Europe Day.

Latvian people increasingly think of themselves as Europeans.

We are Europe.

We shape Europe today and its future.

It depends on us how strong, united and resilient Europe we pass on to next generations.

Latvia's membership in the European Union has been a great success.

During this time, Latvian GDP has grown more than threefold.

I want to thank the politicians and responsible officials who, at that time, who recognized the importance of this decision and secure Latvia's accession to the European Union.

One of them is our colleague, Sandra.

I know it was not easy.

Today, we take it for granted that Latvia is part of the euro area and that our most important trading partners are EU Member States.

But things could have turned out differently.

We must value what we have and what we have achieved.

Tens of thousands of our young people have used the Erasmus programme to study abroad.

It gives them equal opportunities to compete with young people who have grown up in other European countries.

And we are proud of every young person who brings that experience back and works in Latvia and for Latvia.

EU funding remains the most important source of public investment in Latvia.

Thanks to EU funds, we have strengthened our energy independence, digital infrastructure, transport networks, and investments in science and innovation.

This is the most important source for Latvia's economic development.

This year, investments from cohesion policy and the Recovery and Resilience Facility are expected to exceed 1.4 billion euros.

These are not just numbers.

Every person in Latvia benefits from this.

It gives us access to a market of 450 million people.

The idea of a united Europe has never been only about the economy.

At the heart of Europe are shared values: democracy, freedom, the rule of law, and equality.

These are the principles that guide us every day.

They have brought us freedom, prosperity and security.

At the same time, we know that in some parts of Europe people are still fighting for these principles.

They are fighting for their place in the democratic European family.

For more than four years, Ukraine has been defending itself against Russia's full-scale invasion.

Russia attacked Ukraine already in 2014, at the moment when the Ukrainian people stood up for their choice to be part of the EU.

We will continue to support Ukraine.

Dear colleagues,

The European Union is changing its priorities and responding to today's needs.

We are strengthening cooperation and investment in security and the defence industry.

This means that Europe is evolving and becoming stronger.

Latvia fully supports this.

Since 2022, we have allocated approximately 1 billion euros to strengthening the Eastern border.

It is encouraging that, in February, the European Commission finally recognised the importance of strengthening the Eastern border.

Honourable guests,

Investments in the defence industry not only strengthen our independence and security but also support the economies of Latvia and Europe.

It is important that our investment is smart and we learn from Ukraine's experience.

I see that the geopolitical events of recent years have strengthened the European Union.

Our discussions at the European Council meetings may be too long.

But in the end, the European Union delivers on its promises.

From the outside, the EU is increasingly seen as a stable and reliable partner.

Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkan countries want to join the European Union. We remember the high price that Ukraine and Moldova have paid to follow this path.

We often criticize ourselves too much.

I am not a politician who supports long delays on strategically important issues.

But in the end, what matters is results.

We delivered the 90 billion EUR loan package for Ukraine.

And we must deliver on the promise of enlargement.

We have been able to agree on trade deals with countries of South America, India, Australia, and extended our strategic cooperation with such partners as Canada and the United Kingdom.

To conclude, I want to underline once again:

We are Europe.

We are not bystanders.

We are shaping Europe's present and future.

Happy Europe Day!