

*Address by Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė at the ceremony celebrating Europe Day on 9 May 2023*

Dear friends, dear Europeans,

This day has its roots in Robert Schuman's dream of a community that would be stronger than the painful scars of the past, a unity that wouldn't extinguish diversity but rather support and enhance it. This dream was born in the aftermath of the world war that devastated Europe, where nations that considered themselves examples of civilization were killing each other.

Schuman's vision became a reality because it turned clear how destructive the all-against-all mentality was. The new Europe repeated 'never again' and built its future on the foundations of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

The community grew stronger, so did the European Union, thereby creating an unprecedented space for security and prosperity that enabled flourishing of European talent and nurturing of a renewed harmony between the free market and social responsibility.

Unfortunately, while Europe talks a lot about history, its lessons still take too long to learn. An economically stronger and increasingly self-absorbed Europe has soon forgot that freedom and democratic values are not given, nor taken for granted, but must be defended and renewed each and every day. And that the lure of authoritarian regimes with 'almost free cheese' – be it gas, oil, investments in strategic infrastructure or real estate – almost always leads to a mice trap, which is a deadly dependence.

For Europe to wake up from its dangerous slumber, to remember the foundation that we all share and to renew the promise to defend freedom, democracy, human dignity, and rights, it took a painful tragedy and the courage of Ukrainian heroes.

Sadly, Europe was short of the current fervour, unity, courage, and determination when by Georgia badly needed it, when Kremlin pressure destroyed the courage to invite Ukraine to NATO in Bucharest, when the war in Ukraine began, and when Crimea was annexed.

Today, we have to pay a painful price for the mistakes of the past. However, the most important thing is that Europe, more united than ever before, has the courage to correct these mistakes and renew Schuman's dream of a vibrant and loving free Europe.

I have no doubt that Ukraine, which is bravely fighting, will soon become a part of the European Union. I have no doubts that Moldova, Georgia, the Western Balkan countries, and even Belarus, which will have finally freed itself from dictatorship, will find their true home here in time.

However, if we want Europe to become stronger and overcome all the complex challenges, we all have to work hard and become a support and encouragement to each other. Today, there is a lot of talk about armed resistance to aggressors and tyrants, but it is no less important to strive for a breakthrough in science, innovation, to strengthen digital and green agendas, and thus become truly independent.

We have much to do, and Europe must take leadership in addressing complex global problems, fighting for clear rules and a strong value-based world order. But the most important thing is that we have already woken up from slumber and clearly know what we want to achieve and where we are heading to.

Today we celebrate Europe - our true home, where our distinctive qualities only serve to bolster us, and diversity thrives in unison. The valiant Ukrainians, with their heroic acts and unwavering determination, are standing guard against the scourge of Russian imperialism that has descended upon their land, with its barbarity and inhumanity that run counter to all notions of civilization. This places a solemn responsibility on each and every one of us to cherish and defend Europe, right here and right now, with all the resources and capabilities at our disposal.

Thank you! Happy celebrations!