

**Address by Ms Ingrida Šimonytė, Prime Minister of Lithuania to the 2021 ESPAS Annual Conference “Shaping Europe's future: Global trends and strategic choices”**

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure and honour to address the 2021 Annual Conference of the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System on shaping Europe's future. It is especially important to discuss how to build the European Union's resilience and autonomy in a fast-changing world. It is also a good and timely opportunity to discuss foresight at the highest level.

I welcome the European Commission's 2021 Strategic Foresight Report on the *European Union's Capacity and Freedom to Act*. My key take-away from it is the following: we can strengthen our Union only if we preserve our determination to act, both individually as its member states and collectively as the European Union. I would like to take this opportunity to share my thoughts about what should be done and how.

As a Union, today and in the future, we want to safeguard our liberal democracies in the rules-based international order and to enjoy the benefits of economic growth in a sustainable environment not just for ourselves, but also for future generations. By and large, it is also what our citizens expect from us - the governments of EU member states and EU institutions.

I believe that we should strive to live up to this expectation by, first of all, acting at all levels - national, European, and global, each time choosing the most appropriate level to leverage our strengths and compensate for our weaknesses. Secondly, I think that autonomy, as discussed by the European Commission, should be understood as capacity for and not from; as serving substantive aims Europeans expect from us, and not a goal in itself.

We as the European Union should have the will and the ability to act as a leader, in partnerships whenever possible, and on our own when necessary. By embedding ourselves in global alliances of like-minded partners we will achieve our ambitions in global governance, climate change, standard setting and regulatory policies, technological development, and reduction of dependence on strategic raw materials. There is hardly any other way for the European Union to continue to stay globally relevant in view of our shrinking share of global economy and population.

Likewise, I cannot imagine European defence without NATO, which is the defence alliance for Europe.

The European Union should act more assertively, using our collective weight more heavily than we currently do to maintain a level playing field and protect our economies from unfair trade practices. We should fence off our strategic assets from those who do not share our values or seek to undermine our way of life. As a Union, we can take more responsibility in our immediate neighbourhood, to the South and East, helping our neighbours to boost their prosperity and resilience, aiming to prevent them drifting away from us, and integrate those who want to be part of our community.

In these turbulent and geopolitically uncertain times, paradoxically as it may sound, my country Lithuania has had its dream of the early 1990s come true, enjoying security and prosperity unseen before. This serves us well as a basis to take on our fair share of responsibilities in domestic reform, in our immediate neighbourhood, and on the global level. Domestically, my government has made a decisive shift towards the green transition, digital transformation, equitable education, and improved governance – in other words, getting Lithuania ready for tomorrow, for our next generation. We know the price of freedom first-hand, not from history books. That is why we act in solidarity with those less fortunate and with like-minded friends and allies, in our neighbourhood and in far-away countries. It is our responsibility to assume and uphold.

As good as it is, Lithuania's is a hard-won position, from which we are embracing the future. We don't take it for granted, and we know that the future may unfold in various ways. As a country, we know what we want to be – open, liberal, democratic, reliable, and prosperous. These goals will not change. But in these times of uncertainty and unprecedented change, it pays off to get ready for any possible turn of events, in other words, to anticipate. Therefore, three weeks ago we launched a project we call Lithuania 2050 aiming to come up with a renewed vision for Lithuania, its possible long-term development scenarios, and roadmaps through foresight and inclusive discussion. I am very glad that on this road we can both learn from and share with other EU member states, for many of whom foresight is becoming part of governance.

Thank you very much and let me wish you a fruitful conference.