European Commission - Speech
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Statement of President von der Leyen on the 30th anniversary of Freedom Defenders Day in Lithuania

Brussels, 13 January 2021

Ladies and Gentlemen,

30 years ago, Soviet tanks and military **1. ...** rolled into Vilnius. There, thousands of **2. ...** were gathering near the TV-Tower. A peaceful crowd, with people from all walks of life, who had come to their **3. ...** from all parts of their country. They wanted to **4. ...** Lithuania´s newly won **5. ...**. These were ordinary citizens, who **6. ...** for **7. ...** instead of foreign rule. Citizens, who wanted to take their future in their own hands.

In the early hours of **8. ... ...** Soviet **9. ...** opened fire. Military vehicles drove straight through the lines of **10. ...** demonstrators. In this cold winter night 30 years ago, 14 people lost their lives. And more than 700 **11.**

Today people all over Lithuania **12. ...** bonfires and **13. ...** like the Freedom Defenders did **14. ...** years ago. To **15. ...** their **16. ...**. To honour their **17. ...**. This is why today, like so many of you, I wear this little blue pin, **18. ...** the **19. ...** flower.

The sacrifice of the **20. ... ...** reminds us how **21. ...** the fundamental values of our Union are. Liberty, Democracy, Rule of law, Freedom of Expression, and the right of each country to independently choose its future: In Europe, we too often take these **22. ... ...** for granted. But

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the truth is: To keep them alive, we have to fight for them every single day.

Our Union owes Lithuania´s Freedom Defenders. Because today´s Europe would look different without their bravery. The events of January **23. ...** played a **24. ...** role in overcoming the division of our continent. At the time, **25. ...** against the Soviet Union almost seemed like a **26. ...** gesture. But what happened that night in Vilnius **27. ...** all over the world. The events caused shock waves that in the end shattered **28. ...** .

Today Lithuania is a proud member of the **29. .....** . And what a success story this is! As a member of the Euro and of Schengen Lithuania is at the heart of European **30. ...** .

From **31. ...** in **32. ...** until now, living standards have risen dramatically. And Lithuanians are optimistic about the future of the European Union.

For me, this is the best way, to hold up the Freedom Defenders´ legacy: To be a proud and vital part of a Union, that defends the values, that were so dear to their hearts.

Let´s celebrate **33. ...**

! Thank you!

SPEECH/21/106

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