



**Report of the**  
**34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly and 21<sup>st</sup> Baltic Council**  
*19-20 November 2015, Vilnius (Lithuania)*

**1. Presiding officers of the Session:**

- **Giedrė Purvaneckienė**, President, Chair of the Lithuanian delegation, Lithuania
- **Jānis Vucāns**, Vice President, Chair of the Latvian delegation, Latvia
- **Aadu Must**, Member of the Presidium, Vice Chair of the Estonian delegation, Estonia

**2. Agenda of the Session:**

- Opening of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- 21<sup>st</sup> Baltic Council;
- Signing of the Joint Statement of the 21<sup>st</sup> Baltic Council;
- Continuation of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- Session 1: Development of joint transport and infrastructure projects in the region: the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* and the *Via Baltica projects*;
- Session 2: Cooperation of the Baltic States in cybersecurity and cyber defence;
- Session 3: Implementation of the Partnership Agreement on Joint Procurements of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices and Lending of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices Procurable Centrally and other joint health care projects;
- Session 4: Internal security of the European Union: coherence between the internal and external dimensions to protect our societies;
- Report of the Presidium;
- Report of the Budget and Audit Committee;
- Adoption of the Final Document of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- Election of the President and Vice Presidents of the Baltic Assembly for 2016;
- Election of the chairpersons and vice chairpersons of the committees;
- Address by the newly elected President of the Baltic Assembly;
- Signing of the Final Document of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly.

## Opening of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly

President of the Baltic Assembly **Giedrė Purvaneckienė** opened the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly. She underlined that the work and dialogue within the Baltic Assembly will serve as response to challenges faced by the Baltic States.

*After the welcoming address of the President of the Baltic Assembly, the national anthems of the three Baltic Republics were played.*

President of the Baltic Assembly **Giedrė Purvaneckienė** informed that on 13 November 2015 in Paris, a series of coordinated terrorist attacks occurred in Paris. It is an attack against everyone. International society will face this threat together with all necessary means and ruthless determination. France is a great and strong nation. Its values of liberty, equality and fraternity inspired and inspire the European Union (EU). The Baltic States stand united with the French people and the Government of France. This shameful act of terrorism will only achieve the opposite of its purpose, which was to divide and frighten. It is necessary to defeat extremism, terrorism and hatred. Europeans will remember 13 November 2015 as a European day of mourning.

*After the speech by President of the Baltic Assembly **Giedrė Purvaneckienė** a minute of silence was held.*

President of the Baltic Assembly **Giedrė Purvaneckienė** underlined that the Baltic States have always had high respect for history of the Baltic nations and region. In terms of civilisation, history of the Baltic cooperation could be compared only with introduction of a thick book. History of the Baltic cooperation is not just a moment; it is a fundamental period of alteration for Baltic nations and the Region. Twenty-five years ago – on 12 May 1990 in Tallinn and on 1 December 1990 in Vilnius – two strategically important milestones have to be inscribed in minds. On 12 May 1990 in Tallinn, the Declaration of Unanimity and Cooperation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was signed by Vytautas Landsbergis, Chair of the Supreme Council of Lithuania, Arnold Rüütel, Chair of of Estonia and Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Chair of the Supreme Council of Latvia. This Declaration expressed strong determination to strengthen mutual cooperation of the Baltic States. At that time, Chair of the Supreme Councils established the Council of the Baltic States. She quoted one of the

paragraphs of the Declaration – “cooperation institution was established in order to assist in the full restoration of state independence of the three Republics”.

A political event that was of paramount importance in attracting the attention of the international community to the aspirations of the Baltic nations to gain independence was the meeting in Vilnius on 1 December 1990, when deputies of the Lithuanian, Estonian and Latvian Supreme Councils came together for the Council of the Baltic States. During this meeting, almost 25 years ago, in Vilnius, enthusiastic and brave parliamentarians from Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia agreed about the Appeal to the Parliaments of the World. They asked parliamentarians of the World to use their influence and efforts in forcing the USSR to discontinue its policy of threats and its political, economic and military pressure in relation to the Baltic States. They asked to agree on schedules for the withdrawal of Soviet military troops from the territories of the Baltic States while guaranteeing non-interference by these troops in the affairs of the Baltic States; to eliminate the obstacles preventing Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia from maintaining direct cross-border contact with the rest of the world. The Appeal also contained other significant demands.

These politically significant decisions laid down a significant basis for establishment of the Baltic Assembly a year later - on 8 November 1991. The establishment of the Baltic Assembly originated from the cooperation of the popular movements of the Baltic States in the late 80's and early 90's.

Chinese thinker and philosopher Confucius said - “Study the past if you would define the future”. To build the future, it is essential to remember past by making conclusions from our successes and mistakes. Past of the Baltic cooperation is rich, filled with high sense of political responsibility, regional awareness and political commitment. Do not dare to forget fighters for the freedom of the Baltic States. Do not dare to forget founders of the Baltic cooperation. Do not dare to forget the basic principles, which were leading Baltic politicians 25 years ago when they were fighting for freedom, sovereignty and independence of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. And do not dare to forget the value and strength of the Baltic cooperation.

Agenda of this 34<sup>th</sup> Session focuses on four main priorities. Firstly, assess the achieved progress in development of joint transport and infrastructure projects in the region. Secondly, discuss cooperation of the Baltic States in cybersecurity and cyber

defence. Thirdly, analyse the implementation of the Partnership Agreement on Joint Procurements and other joint health care projects. Fourthly, have a debate about coherence between the internal and external dimensions to protect people of the Baltic States.

Beside these listed agenda items, members of the Baltic Assembly will have parliamentary debates also about the EU's Eastern Partnership, strengthening of energy security of the Baltic States and development of the Baltic regional energy market in implementing goals of the EU 2030 framework for climate and energy policies, cooperation in the area of improvement of information security of the Baltic States.

Eyes towards refugees' crisis cannot be closed. Unfortunately, the number of conflicts and crises worldwide continues to expand. Ongoing crises and conflicts, including in Syria and Libya, have led to the current refugees' crisis in Europe. Never before, there have been so many people forced to be on the move by taking the dangerous route to reach Europe. Concerning the refugee crisis, the Baltic States have to stand for values and commitments. Only then, values such as human rights, equality, democracy and international law acquire meaning.

Regrettably, states have failed to anticipate the problem of migration, and now consequences and implications raise panic. The Baltic States are also not ready for refugees' crisis. Back in 2013, the Baltic Assembly Legal Affairs and Security Committee initiated a meeting about immigration and asylum. Unfortunately, governmental experts affirmed that this is not a topic for the Baltic cooperation as this will not be an issue for a longer time. Now there is no time, looking for the best ways on integration of refugees in societies. Fortunately, Nordic partners are ready to share their best practices. The issue of refugees' crisis is and will be on the agenda of cooperation.

Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania **Loreta Graužinienė** noted that over the years, the successful development of the Baltic Assembly activities has demonstrated that Baltic countries share privileged relations, common historical experience, benefits of jointly completed tasks, and the wish to build future together.

Already a number of ambitious projects have been implemented; other projects will be completed in the near future. However, the rapidly changing world poses new challenges on a daily basis. Therefore, the Baltic Assembly's priorities, objectives and targets need to be reviewed. Today, security is the most important aspect for Baltic people, Baltic region, and Europe as a whole. With the increasing number of terrorist attacks against civilian population, it becomes clear that Baltic countries, Europe, and the rest of the world are confronted with a challenge to which it is possible to respond only by joining forces. Therefore, Baltic cooperation in the fields of security and defence need to be strengthened. As a response to the current geopolitical situation, Legal Affairs and Security Committee of the Baltic Assembly should take a more active stance in tackling security matters. It would be reasonable and necessary to organise more meetings at both the Baltic Assembly and parliamentary levels and to communicate and cooperate at the level of national security committees. The joint position of the Baltic States and objective tripartite assessment of the changed security environment will be very relevant for the next year's NATO Summit in Warsaw. The Baltic States must continue to focus on the implementation of the Eastern Partnership programmes and provide multilateral assistance to the Eastern Partnership countries. New challenges should not overshadow common and consistent policy on Ukraine. Moreover, particular attention should be focused on processes ensuring full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

The Baltic cooperation in regional projects in the field of transport and energy is very important. The Baltic States have wisely used the opportunity to strengthen the energy independence of the Baltic region by implementing the project of the liquefied natural gas terminal in Klaipėda. Today, there are no doubts on the importance of this terminal and its impact on the energy security of the entire region. High premium is also placed on furthering other joint projects. It is necessary to ensure prompt implementation and the necessary legislative amendments in strict compliance with the deadlines. It is duty of Parliaments to draft relevant laws in a timely and qualitative manner to enable governments to go on with the work.

Responding to recent geopolitical changes, the Baltic States should urgently take common measures for the opening of the Baltic energy market while fully integrating into the internal energy market of the EU. There is a lot of untapped potential for cooperation in other fields, including but not limited to common search for export

markets and coordination of marketing in order to attract tourist flows. The work done by the Baltic States reaffirms that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are committed to work together in order to find joint solutions to the new challenges and problems in the region. May the concord and cooperation of the Baltic States continue to be based on consensus, respect and unity.

Speaker of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia **Ināra Mūrniece** informed that in 2016 celebrations of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baltic Assembly will be held. The Baltic States should be proud of what has been achieved during these 25 years. Commitment and determination has helped to strengthen the position of the Baltic States in the European and Transatlantic family of countries. Currently, the Baltic countries enjoy freedom, peace and security as well as share joint success stories. The Baltic States have single air patrolling, joint military exercises, joint Baltic Battalion participating in NATO trainings and the joint Baltic energy market is almost finished. One of the most important joint projects is the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project that will connect the Baltic transport network with other European transport networks.

Politicians need to look forward, because politicians are those who provide the strategic vision regarding future of states. This is the time of evolving challenges. The attack in Paris was an attack to all European values; therefore, the Baltic States should be strong and joint in facing the upcoming challenges.

The Baltic States can achieve a lot by joining the forces just like once overcoming the totalitarian regime of USSR. This is the time of great challenges. Security challenges evolve both from the Southern and from the Eastern part of the Europe. Nevertheless, in front of new terrorist attacks the situation in Ukraine should not be forgotten. There should be no illusions about changes of Russian policy in near future. Therefore, the Baltic States need to strengthen unity and relations with allies. The Baltic States should be ready to protect themselves. For that reason, security of the region is and will be the highest priority. The Baltic States not only need to increase the spending on security but also continue cooperation and coordination between the armed forces. Moreover, higher cohesion between the armed forces needs to be ensured. This means, common planning, common procurements and development of infrastructure while at the same time organising joint military exercises. Additional attention should be put on strengthening of the Baltic States external borders.

Latvian Presidency within the Baltic Assembly and the Council of Ministers will continue to address issues of both internal and external security. United position of the Baltic States against the Russia's aggression in Ukraine has been noted also internationally. International pressure on Russia needs to be continued until agreements regarding Ukraine will be settled. Deceptive information and propaganda is today's reality. People are confronted with untruthful political and security campaigns. In order to raise the awareness strategic communication needs to be improved. In the Baltic States there are centres dealing with digital information, such as NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga and Baltic Centre for Media Excellence in Tallinn. Latvian Presidency within the Baltic Assembly will pay special attention to strategic communication.

Energy sector is based on considerations of security, because, nowadays, transport and energy sector is especially important in ensuring the energy security of the Baltic States and interconnectivity with the EU infrastructures. The Baltic States should move towards the EU energy union. Concerning Latvia, in the nearest month Saeima will adopt amendments in the energy law to enable liberalisation of Latvian gas market. This law will also end the Russian energy market dictatorship.

The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project will benefit the Baltic States. The Baltic Assembly has paid a lot of attention to the external economic policy, especially the diversification of the market, which allows mitigating the impact of Russia's sanctions. The Latvian Presidency in the Baltic Assembly will look for additional opportunities to attract external investment, promote export to remote markets and develop common market developing measures for export, especially to strategic partners abroad. Saeima will continue to support the Baltic cooperation.

In 2016, celebrations of the Baltic Assembly 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary will be held. The Latvian Presidency will ensure that celebrations are well organised.

President of the Riigikogu of the Republic of Estonia **Eiki Nestor** noted that as the small drops of water may make the waves in ocean, the thoughts of an individual might make changes in history. He underlined that that success of each Baltic State is an integral part of the success story of the all Baltic States. Baltic countries are closely connected and therefore troubles of one are troubles of others. Success of one inspires the others and failure brings a shadow to all. The history has thought that the absence

of unity like in the 1930's can result a disruption of the statehood. And joint action like in the 1980's and in the beginning of 1990's can brought a success. The Baltic States by becoming members of the NATO and the EU defined the place to belong to in terms of security, culture and economy. Baltic cooperation is important and must continue. This cooperation works by 100% at the level of Parliament speakers. No matter where the speakers are, the joint Baltic interests are represented. In the current highly complicated situation, close cooperation is especially important. The Baltic States need to be united in order to represent the interest of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. In politics, it is unfortunate fact that more complicated problems are the more one tries to detach oneself. Unfortunately, this also makes it harder to find solutions. Today, it is well seen in the EU by the escalation of refugee crisis. The Baltic States are the border states of the EU. The EU member countries need to agree on the EU border guard.

The Baltic Assembly needs to become more efficient and more visible to its citizens. One transition option is to more cooperate between the parliamentary committees. The parliamentary cooperation needs to be valued more that it has been done before. In Estonia, it has been decided that representing the Riigikogu in the Baltic Assembly will give the best result if the parliamentarians will be represented from parliamentary committees. Parliamentary committees will decide which cooperation matters are important and how often parliamentarians need to meet for discussions.

State borders have become too narrow for all problems now and in the future. As the EU Member States, the Baltic States are forced to take important decisions in a short period of time. All this provides a new approach to work and ability to look further ahead. It is necessary to be better aware of common problems in certain spheres of life, problems within the countries and between the countries. Politicians need to be ahead of the time and look further to offer solutions, and not just pass decisions that only record reality. Politicians need to make less declarations, but more specific activities and joint projects.



President of the Baltic Assembly **Giedrė Purvaneckienė** informed that under the Lithuanian Presidency, an ambitious goal to analyse the implementation of the recommendations of the Baltic Assembly by national governments during last three years has been set. All in all, situation in regard to the implementation of the recommendations of the Baltic Assembly is comparatively good. To wit, Baltic Council of Ministers has implemented the recommendations of the Baltic Assembly for 85% - 90%. It is a good result, but there is still a place for improvement and greater success. There are fields where cooperation of the Baltic States is at the highest level, for example, in the field of defence and security. Though, there are fields where cooperation is still hindered by mutual competition. In many cases, like in research and education, economic, social and other fields mutual competition gains an advantage over cooperation. In many cases, short-term arguments for non-cooperation are used. Perhaps, today some of the projects may seem to be expensive but in long-term these projects will be beneficial for growth of the Baltic region. A good example of cooperation is the tourism sector. Tourists perceive the Baltic States as a single destination. Parliamentarians of the Baltic Assembly called responsible governmental representatives for several meetings within a period of several years and finally some progress has been observed – there are some joint marketing activities realised also by the Baltic Council of Ministers. Therefore, within Resolution of the current Session, Baltic parliamentarians have agreed about additional recommendations to governments about the increased cooperation in tourism sector.

Only in close coordination and intense networking between the Baltic Assembly and Baltic Council of Ministers, it is possible to promote welfare and growth in the Baltic region. Only with joint efforts, voice of the Baltic States will be heard internationally.

Chair of the Cooperation Council, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **Linas Linkevičius** noted that years of the Baltic State's independence were marked with common effort to reinforce strategic independence, recreate welfare and wellbeing for citizens of the Baltic countries. The Baltic States cooperated by addressing the same objectives.

In 2015, the Lithuanian Presidency led the Baltic Council of Ministers. During Lithuania's Presidency in the Baltic Council of Ministers, particular focus was put on security. In 2015, together with allies, NATO's Readiness Action Plan was adopted. Security of the Baltic States and the Eastern Partnership Policy are two the most important issues discussed in the scope of security sector. During NATO meeting on 20 May, main decisions in regard to the Eastern Partnership were adopted.

The Baltic countries are in the opinion that more NATO presence in the Baltic States air, land and sea territories is needed. The Baltic States are committed to implement all necessary requirements and responsibilities as the host nation. Security is not a matter that is given in advance, active debates, joint actions and trainings need to be held and coordinated. Therefore, Lithuania has increased defence funding and actively works on defence planning.

The Baltic countries have taken a decision to organise joint battalion unit - the Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT) - for the NATO Response Force Standby. In 2016, the Baltic States will have high readiness groups. The Baltic States will promote coordination and assessment of coordinated plans, and will increase defence capabilities. Particular considerations have been taken in regard to capabilities of Russia.

Both the Baltic States and NATO allies are looking for the NATO 2016 Summit, it is expected that it will be a logical continuation of NATO Wales Summit 2014. It is expected that particular focus will be put on strategic planning and adoption of documents regulating situation during the crisis. There are new challenges and terrorism threats are evolving. Terrorists have no nationality and no religion, even though they cover their actions by umbrella of religious beliefs. Terrorist methods have nothing common with humanity and divine forces. It is important to closely coordinate joint efforts. Special service and relevant agencies of the Baltic States have to work together more intensively. It is naive to believe that border or a fence around a country will solve all the problems. The only solution is to cooperate in order to reach effectiveness and results.

The Eastern Partnership is a priority for each and all three Baltic States. The Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga provided an opportunity to evaluate the progress achieved in relations between the EU and the Eastern Partners since the last Summit in Vilnius, and to identify and begin to formulate new strategic guidance on further steps to be

taken. Summit in Riga opened the eyes to challenges and problems. It has also demonstrates how important the topic is today and how difficult it is to keep the Eastern Partnership on the agenda. Due to recent challenges, the Eastern Partnership is not the most popular international subject. The Baltic States need to find partners and allies, and try to raise the importance of this issue.

Another important challenge is propaganda. Untruthful information should not be cultivated, the Baltic States should be able to reflect the actual situation and fight against propaganda. Otherwise, Baltic countries may become victims of warfare. The Baltic States should show to allies that propaganda is not only the problem of Eastern countries, but for the whole international society. Resistance against propaganda should be more effective, that it is now.

Cooperation in energy sector is highly important. In 2015, cooperation ensured breakthrough for the Baltic countries, as a result liquefied gas terminal in Klaipėda started to work. Offered opportunities by the terminal can be used not only for Lithuania, but also for Latvia and Estonia. Terminal provides possibility for energy diversification and decreases the role of Russia's energy monopoly. The work on improvement of regional connectivity should be continued.

Cooperation in transport area is also an important task that should be continued. The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* and *ViaBaltica* projects have huge role and are a priority for transport sector of the Baltic States.

The Baltic States are not passive towards security matters in Baltic region. With establishment of the NATO competence centres in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the Baltic States are at the forefront of the risk assessment.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia **Edgars Rinkēvičs** noted that the world is facing great challenges and *Da'esh* has declared a war to civilized world. The bloodshed in France is a clear message of evolving challenges. All these crimes have reminded international community to act jointly and to join efforts to fight against terrorism and extremism. In this challenging situation, human and democratic values that are the cornerstone of the Western world need to be maintained. International society needs to establish a system that allows seeing the difference between those who are flying terrorists and terrorists themselves. Today, the Europe is

experiencing unprecedented flows of migrants. This crisis has to be solved. Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have solidary agreed to relocate these persons.

Restoration of the Baltic States independence was possible due to human rights, democracy and self-determination. However, the attacks of radicals are against all those fundamental values. The Baltic States have not done everything to defend the security of external borders. Combating of human trafficking and organised crime is not at the highest level. Therefore, the Baltic States must ensure proper control of the asylum seekers in order to prevent terrorists from penetrating borders. Instead of sticking to what has been decided, politicians sometimes avoid action. The Baltic States need to coordinate positions and have to be united in the EU. The Baltic States do not need two-way development in the EU.

It is clear that the international situation is worsening; therefore, the Baltic States need to work even more closely. Looking back into the history of the Baltic States, it is clear why pragmatic and cautious decisions are sometimes made. For that reason, it is important that the Baltic States continue to hold a common position within the NATO, promoting the NATO Readiness Action Plan along with the Baltic States security guidelines. The aim to achieve 2% of GDP for the defence should be achieved.

The Baltic Defence College is an excellent example of trilateral cooperation, where the highest-level professionals are being prepared. Another success story is organisation of joint military trainings and establishment of the Baltic Battalion, which has successfully started in the NATO Readiness trainings in Spain. This year, particular attention is dedicated towards security and defence policy. Therefore, several important events will take place: 1) the NATO Force Integration Unit will be opened in the Baltic States; 2) the Memorandum of Understanding about Joint Headquarters element creation across the Baltic States, which is an important step towards strengthening collective security; 3) signing of joint statement of the 21<sup>st</sup> Baltic Council.

Despite evolving challenges, the situation in Ukraine should not to be forgotten. The strong position of the Baltic States in regard to Ukraine and Russia's conflict has been internationally noticed and appreciated. The Baltic States are few of the most active and passionate supporters of Ukraine and will continue to provide support also in future. There is only one solution for the conflict – full implementation of the Minsk

Agreements. Until it is not done, there is no reason to soften international pressure towards Russia. The Baltic States should consistently remind about the illegal annexation of Crimea. Violations of international law should not be ignored, for that reason the Baltic States together with like-minded countries in the EU and other international organizations should continue to raise these issues and make counteractions to those disturbing the peace. The Baltic States should also actively support Moldova and Georgia towards their path of European integration.

During, the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU efforts were targeted towards promotion of understanding in regard to security challenges and possibilities to respond on them accordingly. Within the contemporary geopolitical situation a new security threat has evolved – hybrid war. Rapidly developing information war affects sectors of national security, therefore rapid response should be provided. One of the most effective countermeasures is a strategic communication, whose role in today's conditions has significantly increased. Strategic communication should become an integral part of the Baltic States, the EU's and NATO's policies, and serve as a support to reach common goals. The EU's Action Plan in the field of strategic communication has been developed. An important role is given to the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga; its research works and special educational programs underline the significance of strategic communication.

At the same time, involvement of all state institutions and society is needed. People need to develop critical thinking and ability to analyse the information provided from the media. The Baltic States have achieved a lot in this regard. A week ago, in Tallinn, the Baltic Media Centre of Excellence was opened, The Centre has started its work with an aim to strengthen the quality of journalism in the Baltic States and the Eastern Partnership countries.

Evaluating the current international situation, it is clear that closer cooperation is needed in the field of energy security. With joint efforts, the Baltic States have made the first steps towards termination of energy market isolation and free internal energy market. The liquefied gas terminal in Klaipėda, offers numerous possibilities. In order to make a fully use of the provided possibilities further development of terminal free cross-border trade facilitation and infrastructure, including the advantages provided by the Inčukalns underground storage is important. Another important achievement is

two regional importance energy interconnection - *NordBalt* and *LitPolLink* - opening in Lithuania. The next step is synchronization of the Baltic States energy markets with the rest of European energy markets. It is important to continue the process started, so in future successfully integrated energy market would serve as a good example not only in the EU but also internationally.

An important precondition of increased welfare and security in the Baltic States is developed transport infrastructure. Implementation of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project is strategically important, because it will integrate the Baltic States within the EU joint transportation network and diversify flow of transit in direction North-South as well as open new export markets. The Baltic States may feel satisfied for the work done in regard to project implementation, including the submitted joint application of the Baltic States to the European Commission about for the first round of project funding. The European Commission approved co-financing for more than 80%. All three Baltic States will gain from timely implementation of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project. The project has geopolitical and economical benefit; therefore, it needs to be advanced.

This year, Latvia had the honour to take the Presidency of the Council of the EU. This was possible also with a strong support of Lithuania and Estonia. Year 2018 will not only be the year of Estonian Presidency in the Council of the EU, but also 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baltic States.

Lithuania and Estonia are the Latvia's largest trade partners and the most important tourism destinations. The Baltic States are also linked by membership of the EU's common currency area. Therefore, preconditions for more rapid interstate transitions, economic activities and decrease of welfare level are ensured. The next step for Latvia and Lithuania is joining to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In the upcoming months, discussions about technicalities will be concluded and, hopefully, decision about Latvia's joining to the OECD will be adopted. Lithuania has also started debates with the OECD. The OECD is an important instrument that will continue improvement of Baltic States national governance and economic development in accordance with the highest standards.

In 2016, Latvia will take over duties in the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers. It is planned to continue with already started projects and strengthen

cooperation in fields that ensure internal continuity of previous presidency. Priority issues are: 1) strengthening of security within the region; 2) promotion of strategic communication; 3) development of transport and energy infrastructure. In regard to the first priority important aspects are joint defence planning, strengthening of national borders, good governance of migration and implementation of asylum policy. In regard to the second priority it is important to ensure improvements in quality provisions, to provide unbiased information within the region and protection of European values. It is important to increase public awareness about democratic values, supporting independent media. In regard to the third priority the Baltic States should work on the implementation of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project and strengthen energy security of the Baltic States.

In 2016, Latvia will undertake the role of coordinating Nordic-Baltic (NB8) cooperation format. It is planned to focus on matters connected with regional security.

Year 2016, promises to bring numerous new challenges, nevertheless with joint approach, strict determination and close cooperation the Baltic States can overcome all difficulties and accomplish all future initiatives.

The Baltic Assembly has played a major role in strengthening cooperation of the Baltic States, coordination and promoting broader discussions of regionally important issues.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **Marina Kaljarund** noted that the priorities for 2015 reflected the changed security situation in the Baltic region. The emphasis was put on increasing the military, economic, energy and cyber security of the Baltic States. Year 2015 has been a success for the Baltic States. Lithuania joined the euro zone, where all the Baltic States now belong, and Latvia had a very successful Presidency of the Council of the EU. Estonia has a good opportunity to learn from the experience of its neighbours.

The Baltic States should always look at the problems and possible solutions in a wider context – including the whole Nordic-Baltic region and Poland. This concerns both the security policy and economy. So far, the developments in better mutual understanding and cooperation between the countries of the region have been encouraging.

Next year, the Baltic Assembly will celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary under the Latvian Presidency. During this relatively long period, it is the first time experiencing a sudden negative change of general security situation. Due to changed security situation the Baltic States cooperation should focus on the security and welfare.

The Baltic States are facing common security challenges. These may be conventional, terrorist or hybrid threats. Russia's aggression in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea has made the global security situation more complicated and less predictable. Russia's aggressive behaviour threatens not only the East, but now also from the South.

This is why NATO's renewed emphasis on deterrence and collective defence is welcomed. The Wales Summit showed that NATO is strong and committed to ensure security of all its members. After the Summit, the Baltic States made considerable progress and brought collective defence into the centre of NATO's attention. It is important to implement the Decisions of the Wales Summit and to prepare for the Warsaw Summit.

The homework – national defence starts at home – should not to be forgotten. The Baltic States have to improve ability to defend them and provide the best possible support to allied forces that rotate in Baltic countries. Investing 2 % of GDP should be the minimum level, and all the allies must reach this. As this could not happen overnight, several allied countries have decided to increase their defence expenses in order to fulfil the commitments made in Wales. By doing this, they are sending out a clear message of solidarity, and are an inspiration to others.

Cooperation in the field of defence has resulted in joint Baltic projects that are one of the most effective forms of defence cooperation in Europe. Baltic air surveillance network (BALTNET) and Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL) are just some of the most visible cooperation projects. Most recent achievements – the participation of the Baltic Battalion at the NATO Response Force training operation Trident Juncture in Spain and the establishment of a non-permanent Baltic Joint Staff Element – play a crucial role in the coordination of the Baltic regional security problems and responding to them.

Another important security aspect is border defence. The Baltic States do not cover a large territory; only 2,700 kilometres of land border. Leaving aside the 981 kilometres



of Schengen Area's internal border and 1,700 kilometres of guarded external border. In this tense security situation and under a growing migration pressure, guarding of this border is becoming an increasingly important challenge for the Baltic States. Baltic countries are all connected to each other; the things one country has done or not done directly influence the situation of its neighbours. National plans for improving the efficiency of border guarding need to be developed and coordinated.

A good example of the Baltic States joint contribution is the assistance given to Slovenia in receiving refugees. The base principle used to accomplish the police missions was the principle of solidarity.

In light of recent tragic events in Paris, the Baltic States need to consider the potential threats of terror into a new perspective. These activities need well coordination.

The Baltic States need to remain strong policy towards Russia. If the Minsk Agreements will not be respected sanctions should be continued.

Both in connection with all of the above, but also in its own right, the issue of strategic communication is particularly crucial for the Baltic States.

All the Baltic States contributed to the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga.

The Baltic States need to assist Eastern Partnership countries and provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The Eastern Partnership was one of the priorities of Latvian Presidency in the Council of the EU. Estonia considers Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia its priority partner countries.

The Baltic cooperation is in good shape. This is reflected both in the common response to the changed security situation as well as in the daily practical cooperation in various fields. In a year, the Baltic cooperation has made a strong leap forward.

This year, remarkable developments have taken place in several important fields, such as cooperation in information technology, development of the regional energy market and transport infrastructure.

Until very recently, Russia was the sole supplier of natural gas for Estonia. After the LNG terminal was opened in Klaipėda, at the end of 2014, the situation has changed

and several Estonian gas traders are already cooperating with Lithuania. The Baltic States gas market has opened up for competition and a common gas market is taking shape. The gas imported from Klaipėda covered one fourth of Estonia's total gas consumption. Nevertheless, transporting larger amounts of gas requires better pipeline connections.

Recently, the agreement connecting the gas networks of Lithuania and Poland was signed. It is expected that the project will be completed in 2019, and that it will increase the supply security of gas in the Baltic region. It is planned that Estonia will continue to work on a LNG terminal project and the Baltic-connector gas pipeline in cooperation with Finland.

The third Estonian-Latvian power line project will be co-financed by the Connecting Europe Facility. This enables to complete construction of connection necessary for supplying the two countries with energy.

The synchronisation of the Baltic energy systems with the Central European electric power frequencies is a more serious challenge than building local energy connections. Although there are positive developments in implementing this plan, cooperation with Poland should be more active.

It is as clear as ever that the Baltic transport infrastructure needs modern solutions. Developing the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project that would enable a travel speed of 240 km per hour continues to be of great relevance. A massive long-term project requires good governance, coordination and avoiding delays. The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* joint venture, which was formed a year ago, has a central role in project development. All stakeholders – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – need to fulfil the role of the central coordinator efficiently.

For years, Estonia has focused on the development and application of IT solutions. Cyber space holds great-unused potential. The Baltic IT cooperation should prioritise the introduction of cross-border digital signatures. Recently, the trilateral memorandum was signed. However, this was only the first step in the long way towards creating a permanent joint platform for civilian use. Digital signatures would save time and money on daily cross-border business transactions.

The Baltic States cooperate in cyber defence. Latvia and Lithuania participate in the work of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. Nevertheless, cyber defence cooperation still has not used all the possibilities offered by the B3 format and partnership with the United States of America. The discussions within “the Baltic Ghost framework” could be taken to a much deeper level and the cyber component of conventional military training could be enhanced.

A remarkable event will take place in 2018 – the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the proclamation of independent Baltic States. Several joint events are planned to mark the anniversary. Preparation for the joint exhibition of the Baltic States at the largest book fair in the world and at the accompanying culture programme in London are couple of the largest joint events planned.

## **Debate**

Vice Chair of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee **Veiko Spolītis** asked about the Baltic air infrastructure. He underlined the importantness of future air traffic in the Baltic States. Few weeks ago, the *EstonianAir* ended its work, the *LithuanianAir* has also ended its work. Cooperation in the field of air infrastructure would benefit all three Baltic States. Joint air infrastructure in the Baltic States could be also one of initiatives during the upcoming Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia **Edgars Rinkēvičs** noted that the idea about establishing joint airline of the Baltic States is not new. Prime Ministers and Transport Ministers of the Baltic States have discussed this issue quite recently. Single airline would be a great tool strengthening aviation sector just like in Scandinavian countries, but, unfortunately, common agreement has not been reached. Partners have informed, that each state still aims of having its own airline. He noted that the Baltic States should consider development of joint airline, because small airlines eventually struggle with problems of existence. Latvian government is currently discussing future possibilities of the *airBaltic*. Currently, it is in the interests of Latvia to preserve national airline.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **Marina Kaljarund** underlined that proposals in regard to establishment of joint Baltic airline should come from

aviation companies. Moreover, proposals should be viable and economically faceable. She informed that discussions about airlines, airline infrastructure and the EU Regulations on air traffic in the European Parliament are held. Nevertheless, parliamentarians in the European Parliament should be more active in these issues.

Vice Chair of the Welfare Committee **Imants Parādnieks** underlined that the Draft Resolution of the Baltic Assembly provides that closer cooperation in joint transport and infrastructure projects is needed. This phrase should be accompanied with real actions, because it also coincides with security and regional interests of the Baltic States. Discussions about joint transportation and infrastructure projects should be held at the highest level. Establishment of joint Baltic airline would benefit all three Baltic States.

Chair of the Cooperation Council, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **Linas Linkevičius** proposed to raise the issue about joint Baltic airline to Minister of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania Rimantas Sinkevičius.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee **Jānis Ādamsons** informed that debates about the cyber threats and cyber defence are held in the Saeima. In 2013, when the 32<sup>nd</sup> Resolution of the Baltic Assembly was adopted, it was proposed to open joint Baltic Cyber centre. Governments of the Baltic States should finally agree on establishment of a joint Baltic Cyber centre.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia **Edgars Rinkēvičs** informed that during the Latvian Presidency in the Baltic Council of Ministers discussions about establishing a joint Baltic Cyber centre will be held.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **Marina Kaljarund** informed that on practical level the Baltic cooperation in cybersecurity is working excellently. The legal framework of cooperation is the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime. Cooperation of the Baltic States in cyber security could be taken at higher level.

Vice President of the Euronest PA, Member of the Georgian Parliament **Victor Dolidze** asked about the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy that was adopted on 18 November 2015. He asked how the Review and the future of the

European Neighbourhood Policy are perceived in the Baltic States. He asked to present opinion of the Baltic States in regard to Visa-free regime with Georgia.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **Marina Kaljarund** informed that Estonia actively participated in development of the EU Neighbourhood Policy. Estonia's priority was to ensure that the EU European Neighbourhood Policy does not remain without intention. During the current crisis in regard to migration flows, it was important to keep the balance between the assistance given to Southern and Eastern partners. Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova have achieved severe progress. Georgia has fulfilled all technical requirements necessary for the Visa-free system; therefore, further progress towards the Visa-free regime should follow. However, Georgia should be aware of political element that could be present. Although, Visa-free regime is a technical issue, many EU Member States see the regime as a political matter.

Chair of the Cooperation Council, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **Linas Linkevičius** informed that achievements of Eastern partners are much appreciated. In regard to each Eastern Partnership country special policy considering its individual approach has been developed. He informed that Decision in regard to Georgia Visa-free regime can be expected in the middle of December. He underlined that whatever the Decision will be taken, it should not be taken as the final. Georgia should continue to focus on internal reforms notwithstanding any challenges.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia **Edgars Rinkēvičs** noted that Georgia has accomplished all the necessary reforms for the Visa-free regime. If the EU Commissions Report will be positive, next year further formal process of decision making in the EU Parliament and the EU Council will be completed.

The primary priority of the Baltic States is to ensure that the Eastern Partnership is kept on the agenda. Unfortunately, during the last meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council the Eastern Partnership was not discussed, even though it was in the agenda. Currently, all attention is focused on migration problems and escalation of terrorism.

Vice Chair of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee, Vice Chair of the Budget and Audit Committee **Toomas Kivimägi** informed that *EstonianAir* had to fold, because EU institutions noted that Estonia has provided illegal state aid for the company. The EU institutions informed that this was not in accordance with the EU Regulations.

Foreign Ministers of the Baltic States should inform about permitted rules of state aid in aviation. The *EstonianAir* cannot compete with the big aviation companies like *Lufthansa* without state aid. The rules for small countries in regard to state aid for national airlines should be negotiated at the EU level.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia **Edgars Rinkēvičs** informed that it needs to be decided what is the best approach to guide the interest of the Baltic States. There are two types of aviation companies: 1) the large companies and 2) the low cost airline companies. If the large aviation companies will also get a state aid, then the idea about special rules on state aid for aviation companies will not benefit the Baltic States. The adopted rules will equally apply to all aviation companies.

Further integration of air transportation is definitely needed; therefore, further discussions of the Baltic States Transport Ministers should be held. Each of the Baltic States concentrated on national aviation line and less to regional aviation interests.

President of the Baltic Assembly, Chair of the Lithuanian delegation **Giedrė Purvaneckienė** asked to **Linas Linkevičius** whether actions are coordinated with the Baltic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council of Ministers in regard to migration problems.

Chair of the Cooperation Council, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **Linas Linkevičius** informed that cooperation between the Baltic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council of Ministers is becoming closer. The horizontal and vertical sharing of information between the Baltic's and Nordic's is becoming a daily matter. The Baltic-Nordic format is becoming internationally recognizable format.

President of the Baltic Assembly, Chair of the Lithuanian delegation **Giedrė Purvaneckienė** informed that the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers have together prepared a Joint Statement. The Statement testifies the

common position in regard to cooperation of the Baltic States, regional and global developments as well as sets the cooperation framework of the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers for 2016.

*Joint Statement of the 21<sup>st</sup> Baltic Council was signed.*

<b>Continuation of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly</b>
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<b>Session 1</b>
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<b>Development of joint transport and infrastructure projects in the region:</b>
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<b><i>Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica and Via Baltica projects</i></b>
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Member of Presidium, Vice Chair of the Lithuanian delegation **Rytas Kupčinskas** informed that the EU's ten-year growth strategy (Europe 2020) seeks to make the EU's economy smart, sustainable and inclusive. Transport is a cornerstone of the European integration process and is firmly linked to the creation of the internal market, which promotes economic growth.

Europe needs strong transport connections to drive trade and economic growth, and to boost employment and prosperity. Transport networks are at the heart of the supply chain and constitute the foundation of any country's economy; they allow goods to be distributed efficiently and people to travel.

The European Commission's White Paper on Transport (2011) also sets ambitious targets for countries. The main goal for all three Baltic States as well as for all Member States along the North Sea–Baltic corridor is to strengthen social, economic and territorial cohesion of the EU and to contribute to the development of a single European Transport Area. In the transport sector, work towards the establishment of an effective and well-functioning transport infrastructure network needs to be continued. The Baltic States should contribute to the completion and strengthening of the EU internal market by filling in the missing links.

The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project is priority investment project and the most important tool for realising ambition of the Baltic States to become the most competitive region in the EU. The project aims at bridging the missing link within the

Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), namely within the North Sea–Baltic corridor.

Transportation corridors between the Baltic States need to be modernised and kept in a good quality. The international highway – *Via Baltica* – is important route for cargo transportation. The Baltic States need to pay the same attention to the development of road connections as well.

Minister of the Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania **Rimantas Sinkevičius** informed that one of the most important aspirations in mobility of the European Commission is to improve the flow of passengers and cargo as well as transportation between the countries. The quality of the Baltic transport infrastructure still lacks behind from quality of elder EU Members States. The goals of the Baltic States are to improve transport corridors and to integrate the transport modes as well as shorten the time of passenger and cargo transports. In order to achieve the goals, the Baltic States should overcome several challenges. In the last financing period from 2007-2013, the road and railway transport received the largest investments.

The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project needs to be implemented in qualitative and responsible manner. The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project is a precondition for further economic growth in the Baltic States and the whole region. For Lithuania, it will ensure higher integration in the EU and economic security. The new gauge will open possibilities for business and will allow residence to faster and safer travel around the EU. This project is important also for neighbouring countries – Poland and Finland. This project will provide 12 000 new working places. 1 working place created by the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project will provide 1,14 working places in other fields. According to estimations, the project expenditure will reach EUR 5 billion. The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project will also benefit tourism sector, especially enhancing tourism in cities located near the railway line stops. On 27 August 2015, the first pilot travel without any stops took place. In October 2015, construction of the European gauge line from Lithuanian-Polish border to Kaunas Central railway station was officially finished. On 16 October 2015, special event dedicated to the conclusion of construction works took place. Soon the technical design of the Palemonas (Kaunas) railway station will be accomplished.



The needs of the Baltic States in transport infrastructure are very similar. In 2025, Lithuania will require EUR 2 billion investments. The next funding agreement between the Baltic States and the EU will be signed in December 2015.

The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project is very important, nevertheless responding to the second call of the EU for funding, the Baltic States will submit proposals for other projects as well. The deadline for submitting new tenders is February 2016.

The Baltic States should consolidate cooperation in regard to implementation of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project. Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania should adopt special *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project act that would set the requirements for project implementation including legal, financial and organisational conditions. In order to ensure regular flows of cargo and other business transfers further coordination with partners is needed. Infrastructure modernisation and railroad projects create social and economic benefits.

The *Via Baltica* is the most important motorway that connects the Baltic States with Poland and other EU Member States. Annual flows of transfers are growing. The greatest success is guarantee that the *Via Baltica* receives adequate funding both from the EU and national funds. Modernisation of roads and motorways will provide efficient land communication between the Baltic States, Western and Central European countries. Increasing traffic safety on the *Via Baltica* will decrease road accidents.

## **Debate**

Vice Chair of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee, Vice Chair of the Budget and Audit Committee **Toomas Kivimägi** informed that in Estonia an opinion that Lithuania is not the most supportive country for the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project has formed. However, considering the presentation by **Rimantas Sinkevičius**, Lithuania has included the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project in the main infrastructure priorities. The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project is the largest joint connecting project of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. It is also a project that will need the greatest investments in forthcoming years.

Minister of the Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania **Rimantas Sinkevičius** informed that Lithuania is committed to continue the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project, therefore EUR 170 million have been allocated for the implementation of project. The largest part of allocated funds will be invested in link Vilnius-Latvia.

Vice Chair of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee **Veiko Spoltis** asked about possible obstacles in regard to Mažeikiai-Renģe railway line. He asked about policy towards air infrastructure in the Baltic States.

Minister of the Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania **Rimantas Sinkevičius** informed that implementation of the joint venture for the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project cannot be successfully continued if common agreement is not achieved.

Lithuania has made several attempts to have a national air carrier, unfortunately, those attempts were unsuccessful. It would be logical to open discussions about joint air carrier. These issues could be also reviewed within the Baltic Assembly. Difficulties could arise discussing the share of flights between the Baltic States and proportion of investments. Lithuania currently is open to all airlines willing to work in Lithuania. Moreover, current Lithuanian air transport concepts could be revised.

Chair of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee **Bronius Pauža** informed that Lithuania has opened the first European line of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project. He asked about law regulations and about possible problems in cooperation with Poland.

Minister of the Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania **Rimantas Sinkevičius** informed that it is difficult to comment on problems with Poland. Currently, feasibility study is made for railway line Białystok-Warsaw. Considering that recently a new government in Poland has been appointed, the Baltic States should provide more time for the new government to analyse all aspects of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project.

Member of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee **Raimundas Paliukas** proposed to initiate a meeting with Polish Transport Minister to discuss cooperation possibilities and opportunities provided by the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project in which Poland could be interested.

Minister of the Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania **Rimantas Sinkevičius** informed that Lithuanian representatives have met with Polish counterparts but direct answer from Poland has not been received yet. However, position of Poland is becoming more positive. The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project has its coordinator in the EU, Ms Catherine Trautmann, who is responsible for implementation of the European standard gauge railway projects.

Chair of the GUAM PA, Head of Ukrainian Permanent delegation **Anatoliy Matviyenko** informed that Ukraine has 56 000 mW capacity that could be offered to partner countries. Today, only 1/3 of the possible energy capacity is used. The export of power has stopped. Construction of nuclear power plant in Kaliningrad has been suspended, but construction works of similar nuclear power plant in Belarus are taking place. The deficit of European energy is increasing, Ukraine could offer its energy resources.

Visegrad and Ukraine are using 85 milliard m<sup>3</sup> natural gas. 93% of necessary natural gas is provided by Russia. Diversification of gas market is urgently needed in order to decrease the power of Russia. In 2012, Ukraine imported 65 000 m<sup>3</sup> of liquefied gas. Ukraine is interested in building interconnections with existing terminals in Poland and Klaipėda. LNG Klaipėda terminal could provide strategic assistance for regional gas system. Ukraine has five gas storages near to Poland with capacity 54 million m<sup>3</sup>. These storages could provide diversification of gas for the Baltic States and other EU Member States.

Vice Chair of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee, Vice Chair of the Budget and Audit Committee **Toomas Kivimägi** informed that Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia have two options to survive in the air traffic competition. One option is to join efforts and establish joint Baltic airline. Another option is to apply to the EU for different approach to be used for small countries national carriers. If the EU would agree to provide different rules for small country carriers, then the Baltic States could keep national carriers. Estonia is in favour to try the second option first, but if it

would not be positively evaluated at the EU level, then establishment of joint Baltic States carrier would also be acceptable.

Member of Presidium, Vice Chair of the Lithuanian delegation **Rytas Kupčinskas** noted that it is important to focus on the current transport projects; nevertheless, new projects should be started.

## Session 2

### Cooperation of the Baltic States in cybersecurity and cyber defence

Member of the Presidium, Vice Chair of the Latvian delegation **Romualds Ražuks** informed that based on the reports by the Baltic Council of Ministers, there is an ongoing cooperation among the governments of the Baltic States in the field of cybersecurity. The Baltic Assembly highly appreciates the Memorandum of Understanding between Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications of Estonia, Ministry of Defence of Latvia and Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania on cooperation in cyber security, which was signed electronically on 4 November 2015.

The Baltic States need to cooperate more on Baltic and European level, because the digital world is becoming more and more vulnerable. As much as great inventions and technologies empower the user, their failure and their conscious misuse may lead to unprecedented damage and pose real threats. Technical failures and malicious attacks occur at alarming and ever increasing intervals. Inadequate response to these incidents result in consumers losing confidence, businesses losing money and even national security being put at stake. Statistics are truly alarming. Each minute somewhere around the world a cyber-attack is being performed. The number and impact of cyber incidents continue to grow. No country is immune in cybersecurity. According to data of the 2015, which is provided by “Kaspersky Lab”, 291 800 new malwares have been evolved. It is about 2,8 % more than in the first quarter of 2015.

Cybercrime is one of today's top threats, because to combat cybercrime the criminals do not need to cross-country, nor even exit the room. It should be kept in mind that criminals are stepping up their game and data breaches are increasingly common and devastating. That is why the Baltic States need to act together. That is why Baltic

cooperation at parliamentary and governmental level is essential. Because together the Baltic States are stronger in a cybersecurity field.

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia need to cooperate better and more efficiently than ever before. It is evident: vulnerabilities, backdoors and incidents need to be detected and acted upon as early as possible. What can happen in one of the Baltic States, can happen in another country as well.

If some years ago, cybercrimes were considered as the future threats, then now it could be said that cybercrimes are today's threats. Activities qualified as cybercrimes, cyber-attacks or cyber espionage is strategic "soft power" tools used to achieve some political or economic goals. Moreover, they are as much present as any other wrongful acts described in criminal law. Therefore, the Baltic States should respond accordingly.

Senior Adviser, Cybersecurity and IT Department of the Ministry of National Defence of Republic of Lithuania **Vytautas Butrimas** informed that in May 2007 the 7<sup>th</sup> NATO Cyber Defence Workshop took place. In 2007, during the workshop Estonian representative informed that Estonia is under cyberattack. At that time, it was not clear to whom ask for assistance, there was no agreement for providing assistance and there was no plan describing how to deal with cyberattack. The work on the Memorandum of Understanding between Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications of Estonia, Ministry of Defence of Latvia and Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania started in 2009, when the first meeting was held in Riga. The Memorandum contains parts describing what needs to be protected and cooperation procedure if cyber-attack takes place. It includes also provisions considering wider threats than those in cyber area. Particular focus is put on cross-border cooperation and improvement of collaboration at different levels.

## **Debates**

Vice Chair of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee **Veiko Spolītis** asked about the most critical issues where the Baltic States should work together.

Senior Adviser, Cybersecurity and IT Department of the Ministry of National Defence of Republic of Lithuania **Vytautas Butrimas** informed that the Baltic States should focus on critical infrastructure that ensures proper work of energy sector, transportation, etc. The focus should not be put on “trolling activities in media websites” that are humiliating but not death full. Several years ago, in the United States of America two trains crashed due to technical problems. The sensor that should detect a moving train failed to provide information signal to the train central, as a result, seven people were killed. Currently, terrorists are detonating themselves to cause damage and kill people. However, in future they may consider using cyber malware to cause damage and killing of people at the same time staying alive themselves. The damage that can be caused by malware going into control system of nuclear power plant or any other part of critical infrastructure would be much higher. In the United States of America, there are 17 nuclear power plants, if they would be detonated, the damage caused would be terrifying.

### **Session 3**

#### **Implementation of the Partnership Agreement on Joint Procurements of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices and Lending of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices Procurable Centrally and other joint health care projects**

President of the Baltic Assembly **Giedrė Purvaneckienė** informed that members of the Baltic Assembly are interested to listen to the reports about the achieved progress of the Baltic governments in regard to the joint procurements of medicaments. The process of coordination to start the joint procurement was long and different informal messages have been heard. The choice of tuberculosis vaccines for infants was not the best choice for the pilot project.

In the Resolution of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session, the Baltic Assembly reiterate the need to facilitate implementation of the Partnership Agreement on Joint Procurements of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices and Lending of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices Procurable Centrally, to expand cross-border coordination of emergency aid and to develop other ways of cooperation in the health-care sector.

The Baltic States should not focus on the first procurement and its failure due to the current production problems of the Danish Statens Serum Institute. The Baltic States

should go further by commencing negotiations among experts about joint procurements of medical devices and lending of medical products as well as about specialisation of national medical centres.

She expressed special gratitude to the Ministers for Health of the Baltic States for providing answers to frequent questions by the members of the Welfare Committee. It is a common belief of the parliamentarians of the Baltic Assembly that more should be done in regard to the joint health care projects. The Baltic States have to continue with development of cooperation in exchange of organs for transplantation. Based on the answers by the Baltic Council of Ministers, because of the Baltic parliamentary and governmental cooperation in the field of health care, in 2015, Latvia received 3 kidneys from Estonia and Latvia delivered 2 kidneys to Estonia. However, offers of exchange of lungs, livers and hearts were not accepted due to absence of appropriate recipients.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania **Valentin Gavrilo** informed that on 22 May 2015, Ministries of Health of the Baltic States signed the Partnership Agreement on joint procurement of the medicinal products and medical devices as well as lending of medicinal products and medical devices. In 2012, the first public procurement of Tuberculosis vaccine (BCG) for infants was started. It was based on partnership agreement. Latvia was the leading country for document development and coordination activities with partners. 25 March 2015, partners organised a meeting the documents for the vaccine procurement was coordinated. Unfortunately, the deadline for tender was 13 May 2015. Until 13 May 2015, no proposals were received.

Perhaps, the possible reason for unsuccessful launch of joint venture was the chosen subject. BCG vaccine is a very sensitive subject necessary for all three Baltic States. Vaccine suppliers are in limited number, therefore joint procurement was not as successful as initially expected.

In order to repeat the same joint procurement more attention should be added to shortages of vaccine and technical accomplishment needs to be considered. The Baltic States should follow the example of cooperation between the Japan and Bulgaria.

In the opinion of Lithuania, agreement for joint procurement of BCG vaccines should contain special provisions providing priority for vaccines with the European Control Certificates.

The Baltic States should move further with other procurements in medicinal products and medical devices. Conditions ensuring procurements should be improved. Lithuania has already used the possibilities by the Partnership Agreement and have landed medicinal products from Latvia and Estonia. The Partnership Agreement works, nevertheless, further the subject of cooperation should be chosen more carefully. Effectiveness of the project should not be questioned just because of one failed initiative. The Baltic States have learned the lesson and the next attempt will be more successful. The idea about joint procurements will not be abandoned and new projects will be launched.

## **Debate**

Member of the Education, Science and Culture Committee **Irena Šiaulienė** asked when and on which subject the second attempt for joint procurement will be started.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania **Valentin Gavrilo** informed that no specific solutions and no decisions towards new subject of joint procurement have been made. It is necessary to create conditions for several suppliers giving priority to the EU registered vaccines. Leadership could be divided between the Baltic States. Lithuania is interested to be the leading state for centralisation of medicines in the Baltic States. Unfortunately, the healthcare systems in the Baltic States are not identical. Therefore, future obstacles for cooperation in several areas could arise.

Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia **Egita Pole** informed that in 24 September 2010, four main tasks were agreed: 1) establishment of a common system for state-funded procurement of medicines and medicinal equipment (leading country - Latvia; 2) establishment of joint specialized medical centres for more efficient use of professional skills in the Baltic States (leading state - Lithuania; 3) establishment of an efficiently functioning human organ transplant system of the Baltic States (leading state - Estonia; 4) coordination of emergency help in the border towns of the Baltic States (leading states - Lithuania, Latvia).



On 2 May 2012, the Partnership Agreement was signed. The Baltic States representatives made a decision on joint procurement of BCG for infants. After decision was made the preparation of procurement documentation as a basis for procurements in the future was started. The process of document adoption was lengthy due to harmonization processes in national legislations. In 2014, the Procurement Commission was established. On 4 September 2014, the first meeting of the Commission was held. BCG vaccine procurement was announced on 2 April 2015. On 13 May 2015, procurement concluded without a result, because the only producers discontinued production of the particular vaccine. Currently, Health Ministries of the Baltic States are working on improvements of procurement documents. In future, it is intended to focus not only on medicinal products but also on medical devices.

After the unsuccessful procurement, analysis of the work was made. According to analysis, developed and unified procurement documentation was the strengths of the procurement system. Difficulties in organizational matters between the Baltic States and identification of the subject where the weaknesses. However, if these matters will be improved in future joint procurements will provide possibility for better prices in markets. Unwillingness of producers to cooperate or to provide better price is a potential threat for joint procurement projects of the Baltic States. Even though the Baltic States will improve all cooperation matters, there still exists a possibility that producer would refuse to cooperate.

Discussions about better distribution of particular matters between the Baltic States are being held. However, currently, it seems that each of the Baltic States tries to cover all possible projects not considering best possibilities.

Latvia and Lithuania have concluded an agreement on emergency assistance in border areas. Latvia and Estonia has carried out several transplantations. Further and broader cooperation with Lithuania and Estonia as well as other European countries is welcomed.

Vice President, Chair of the Latvian delegation **Jānis Vucāns** asked about national legislation that could prevent form participation in joint procurements.

Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia **Egita Pole** informed that legislative framework do not provide any obstacles. Currently, difficulties exist between the ministries. Ministries of the Baltic States and experts are not able to agree on the subject of joint procurement.

Vice President, Chair of the Latvian delegation **Jānis Vucāns** noted that if the Healthcare Ministries of the Baltic States would jointly work on joint procurements the workload of ministry employees should reduce.

Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia **Egita Pole** informed that the possibility of delegating procurement related activities to one of the countries should be considered. Currently, all the Baltic States are simultaneously and deeply involved in the process and are overloaded with work, because all matters should be coordinated on daily basis.

Vice President, Chair of the Latvian delegation **Jānis Vucāns** asked to inform more closely about producer unwillingness to cooperate in procurement projects.

Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia **Egita Pole** informed that there exist different aspects that have prevented from conclusion of the agreement with producers on the initially expected price. The possibility of hidden producer plans may also play the role.

Member of the Presidium, Vice Chair of the Latvian delegation **Romualds Ražuks** asked about Lithuanian position for cooperation in regard to cardio field.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania **Valentin Gavrilov** informed that he has no particular information about cooperation in cardio field. In regard to rare diseases the process is ongoing. Lithuania has established stroke clusters and cardiovascular clusters.

Member of the Presidium, Vice Chair of the Latvian delegation **Romualds Ražuks** informed that Decisions of the Baltic Assembly have not been implemented so far. He asked what has been implemented in regard to cooperation in transplantation. Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania Rimantė Šalaševičiūtė informed that certain barriers exist in the legislation of Lithuania. However, all the necessary changes in legislation have been made. Rimantė Šalaševičiūtė also informed that, unfortunately,

Lithuania still has a budget deficit and is not in a position to offer particular initiatives. He asked ministry representatives to comment responses provided by Ms Rimantė Šalaševičiūtė.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania **Valentin Gavrilov** informed that Lithuania faces some difficulties with donor organ transplantations. Currently, Lithuania is drawing conclusions from the success by Latvia and Estonia.

Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia **Egita Pole** informed that cooperation in donor organ transplantations between Estonia and Latvia is successful.

Member of the Presidium, Vice Chair of the Latvian delegation **Romualds Ražuks** noted that shortage of donor organs should not be an obstacle for engaging in exchange with Estonia and Latvia. Cooperation in donor organ transplantations would benefit to all Baltic States.

Member of the Education, Science and Culture Committee **Irena Šiaulienė** asked what hinders adoption of Decision delegating the responsibility to organise procurement to one state.

Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia **Egita Pole** informed that in order to speed the procurement processes leading state for coordination of procurement processes or particular procurement process aspects should be appointed. It can be achieved within the existing system.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania **Valentin Gavrilov** informed that starting from 2015, the first pilot project has been launched. The only failure was the result of joint procurement, if the right conclusions will be made the second attempt will be positive.

Member of the Education, Science and Culture Committee **Irena Šiaulienė** informed that in the Baltic Assembly, the idea about joint procurements has been started seven years ago. For seven years, parliamentarians of the Baltic States are not able to force executive authority to implement financially beneficial projects.

Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia **Egita Pole** informed that in 2012 the agreement was signed. During these three years, foundation for the procurements documents has been developed. Law amendment processes are very lengthy.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania **Valentin Gavrilo** informed that the BCG vaccine was very important for all three Baltic States. Nevertheless, executive authority could not foresee such hindrances as the ones occurred in the end. The chosen subject was in the interest of the Baltic States and decision to choose the vaccine was not difficult.

#### **Session 4**

### **Internal security of the European Union: coherence between the internal and external dimensions to protect our societies**

President of the Baltic Assembly **Giedre Purvaneckienė** noted that security environment has substantially changed. External and internal dimensions of security have merged.

The Baltic States stand together, ready to tackle global challenges, including terrorism, climate change, poverty, organised crime, cybercrime etc. Within the 21<sup>st</sup> Baltic Council debate about the increased number of conflicts, refugees' crisis, cybersecurity and other threats to societies have been started.

When the security situation changes – concrete aims and tasks to implement in the future need to be redefined. Therefore, the issue of coherence between the internal and external dimensions in the agenda of the Session have been included.

Director of Public Security Department, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Tomas Zilinskas** noted that the Baltic States are interrelated by internal and external dimension. Illegal immigration, terrorism and events in Paris clearly indicate the EU's external threats. Therefore, the Baltic States need to cooperate in between, with third countries and international organisations. In June 2014, the European Council defined the strategic guidelines in the area of freedom, security and justice over the coming years. In guidelines, the need to enhance interrelation between the

internal and external sector was stressed. Internal security is mostly connected with relations of Member States with third countries, illegal migration or trafficking.

In 2012, Seimas adopted Lithuania's National Security Strategy, where it was outlined that integral part of Lithuania's national security is security of region, Europe and the world. The National Security Strategy has also committed Lithuania to react to the current changes in the global security environment and contribute to stability of international security. Lithuania's National Security Strategy will be reviewed on 1 April 2016. Government of Lithuania has approved the EU's strategic direction for activities in the period 2015-2020 and has expressed the view that the EU Justice and Home Affairs policy as well as its goals have to become part of the EU's external relations policy.

In order to prevent international threats Lithuania's law enforcement institutions are actively developing modes of practical cooperation in exchange of information not only with the EU Member States but also with competent institutions of the third countries, including such international organisation as INTERPOL. Exchange of information needs to be strengthened between different intelligence institutions of the Baltic States. In 2015, Lithuania has adopted the Public Security Programme for the period 2015-2025. Protection of the EU external borders has always been priority of Lithuania. Without ensuring coordination between internal and external security policies proper protection of borders will not be ensured. The EU security depends on ability of the EU Members States to strengthen national borders. The destiny and faith of Schengen Area depends on capabilities of the EU Member States to protect the EU external borders. Smart solutions and integrated border management is important to ensure proper border security. Lithuania supports operative cooperation between the EU Member States in regard to enhancing Frontex mandate. Only through joint actions and joint policy, expected results can be achieved.

Parliamentary State Secretary, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Latvia **Evika Silina** informed that during the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU attacks in Paris were experienced. These events brought security issues as the priority on the agenda. New tools to prevent such tragedies need to be found.

In the end of January, the EU Justice and Home Affairs Ministers confirmed the Riga Declaration setting future direction for the fight against terrorism.

During the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU, particular attention was devoted to four key issues: 1) to make full use of the Schengen Area framework, strengthening and upgrading of external border controls; 2) resolving problems connected with the opportunities offered by the Internet to combat terrorism and promotion of violent extremism; 3) cooperation and strengthening the exchange of information in relation to firearms smuggling, as a priority addressing the issue of firearms deactivation; 4) the exchange of information and strengthening of practical cooperation using the possibilities offered by the Europol and Eurojust.

During the Presidency, the Council conclusions on the reviewed EU Internal Security Strategy for the period 2015-2020 was approved. Strategy foresees three priority directions such as: 1) fight against terrorism, radicalization and recruitment of terrorists; 2) fight against serious and organized crime; 3) fight against cyber-crime and cyber security promotion. Practical implementation of priorities must remain the leading-motive of the national law enforcement and security services of the Baltic States.

Today, during the Extraordinary meeting Ministers of Interior of the EU Member States it has been agreed to implement four key issues identified by during the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU. Ministers also agreed to intensify security checks on travellers, especially those crossing the EU external borders.

Already during the Latvian Presidency, particular attention was devoted to the need to strengthen the link between the EU's internal and external security. With regard to the political goals, the Council stressed the importance of the security issues that are of common interest - strengthen cooperation and exchange of best practices with third countries and partners. Latvia fully supports this idea. Currently, Latvia is actively participating in Frontex operations in order to resolve refugee crisis.

It is important to strengthen cooperation and exchange of good practice not only with third countries but also between the EU member States, especially within regional aspect. It is particularly important to implement all initiatives that are targeted on the Baltic cooperation. The Baltic States are facing similar challenges both in internal and external dimension. Therefore, in order to have a common understanding joint training for specialist of the Baltic States need to be organized. In Latvia, state police, border guards and rescue services each have own colleges where specialists are

trained. Apart from main functions, these education institutions provide trainings for police dogs, appointment departure on event locations and acceptance of physical regulatory, etc.

According to the signed cooperation agreements, Senior Officers for the needs of the Interior Ministry are prepared in the Latvian higher education institutions and in second-level professional study programs. Professional qualification is also raised in foreign countries. At present, police authorities of the Baltic States improve knowledge, skills and competences by using opportunities offered by the EU institutions and agencies such as CEPOL, Europol, Interpol, etc. In 2015, courses were held in Estonia and Lithuania. Courses were held on cyber forensics and synthetic drugs theme.

Like the rest of colleges, National Police College has concluded cooperation agreements with related educational institutions in the Baltic States - Lithuanian Ministry of the Interior Police Department Police School and the Estonian Academy of Security Police and the Border Guard College. National Police College has started participation in mobility program Erasmus+. Ongoing projects involve close cooperation with the Estonian and Lithuanian police educational institutions in order to develop cooperation exchange of good practice and provide support for policy reforms.

In 2015, project “Implementation of successful cross-border cooperation model” was concluded. Numerous events, practical trainings, development of joint trainings and joint cross-border surveillance activities were the result of the project.

Latvian State Border Guard actively participated in numerous trainings organized by the Baltic States and Frontex. One of the recent activities was international seminar organised by Finnish Border and Coast Guard Academy specialists “Human scent search training for dogs, the latest methods, and the methodology of detaining persons”.

Latvia was able to find a favourable framework for establishment of the European joint Master's study program “European Joint Masters in Strategic Border Management” accreditation in Latvia. The program is implemented in five consortium partner institutions – in graduate schools and universities of Lithuania, Latvia, the

Netherlands and Finland. In the implementation of the program 76 experts from 14 countries and 20 universities are involved. Currently, 27 students from 20 EU Member States and Schengen Area associated countries have enrolled in the program. Joint master's degree in strategic border management program includes pan-European perspectives and values, cooperation between the operational and academic.

In the field of Baltic Fire and Rescue Service cooperation international oil pollution and clean-up exercise “Balex Delta 2014” needs to be highlighted. The aim of exercise was to check the Baltic Sea region cooperation of institutions and improvement of skills in case of emergency relief. Cross-border cooperation project with Estonia “The cross-border action in capacity-building through joint disaster relief activities in harsh environmental conditions” aims to improve the knowledge and capacity of rescue service personnel to act in the border regions. Fire Safety and Civil Defence College has concluded cooperation agreements with educational institutions in neighbouring countries – with Lithuania Ministry of Interior Fire and Rescue Department Fire School and the Estonian Academy of Security Science. Fire Safety and Civil Defence College has successfully participated in trainings “Siren 2014” and project “Nordplus Adult”.

In regard to the idea of establishing joint Baltic education institution, it is too early to decide. There is a need to conduct a research assessing various aspects concerning the financing of infrastructure, the availability of teachers, learners and the number of acquired qualifications. There is also a need to discuss existing barriers, such as foreign language skills of the staff. Education has a great importance in ensuring internal security. Therefore it needs to be discussed whether establishment of a new educational institutions is the most effective way to ensure internal security, or there are other ways. Currently, financial resources are limited and they are needed for other more substantial projects, such as strengthening of external borders and to increase the capacity of security institutions, etc. Currently, pursued education cooperation between the Baltic States law enforcement agencies is good, but far from perfect. Organization of tactical trainings for maintaining public order is very important.



In this difficult geopolitical situation, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia need to find unique solution on how to build a joint cooperation in order to identify effective solutions for internal and external security in the region and in the EU.

Senior Adviser to the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Estonia **Väino Linde** noted that, today, internal and external dimensions of the EU internal security are of utmost importance. More important than, before 13 November, when machinegun blasts and explosions had not yet sounded in Paris.

Above all issues on the agenda of Ministries of the Interior of the Baltic States, fighting against terrorism has been added as one of the main items. Terrorist attacks in Paris influence the security of people in the whole Europe.

It was not very long ago when something similar happened in Paris. The journalists of Charlie Hebdo perished in January, ten months ago. This tragic event has been almost forgotten. Until on 13 November, the terrorists reminded of it. The reason for this is understandable, because since spring, Member States of the EU have been strongly discussing the unprecedented refugee crisis.

The EU attention has been focused on the people fleeing from their homes, arriving in Europe and asking for an asylum. The EU in accordance with its values has tried to grant it. Although, the countries of Europe have had long arguments over who exactly should help the refugees, how and which activities are the most important. Fear and discussions have led to provisory scenarios, such as: 1) the Schengen free movement area will not withstand the pressure and may fall apart; 2) it may affect the integrity of the EU as such.

Both scenarios should be avoided at all costs. Movement towards the constant weakening of the EU in any way might harm the Baltic States. The Schengen Area must endure in order to make the EU endure. Without that, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Baltic States would be more vulnerable than it is now.

Safety and security of the people should be protected. The EU Member States should use all resources to guarantee that people are protected and feel safe. Nevertheless, this task is not easy, because the general feeling of security is based on the combination of practical activities and emotional estate.

The external border of the EU is not secured. Refugees can just walk through some of the countries on the external border of the EU, as simply as if they were crossing a field. And no one has clear information about who these people are, where they come from and what is their past.

However, after the tragic events in Paris, the Baltic States must try to avoid situation where all refugees are feared and considered unwelcome. This would be unacceptable. Because, refugees are mostly people fleeing from murderers such as those who sowed fear and horror in Paris.

Unfortunately, it is easy to cross some borders of the EU Member States without authorisation. This attributes not only to Islamic terrorists. In the last two years, events in Ukraine have shown what can happen if an independent state cannot control its border.

Already in 2014, Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Estonia and Russia signed the Estonian-Russian border treaty. Currently, the border treaty is being ratified in Parliament of Estonia and it should at least *de iure* increase feeling of security in Estonia. Nevertheless, there is a difference between a temporary control line agreed by both states and a state border officially recognised by both states.

In 2016, Estonia will contribute EUR 20 million for modernisation and protection of the border between Estonia and Russia. Investments of similar size are planned also for the following years, so that by the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Estonia celebrated in 2018, eastern border of the EU and NATO would be the most modern border in Europe.

Only peace and stability in Syria can stop the flows of refugees to Europe. If it would be possible to bring peace to Syria with the EU foreign policy means and through international cooperation, the need to call the migration crisis a crisis would disappear. In the same way, if it would be possible to destroy the ISIS, that has found a foothold in Syria and Iraq, through international cooperation, the threat of terrorism in Europe, would diminish.

Today, the greatest challenges of the EU are the refugee crisis and ensuring the security of people. The Baltic States deal with these challenges through cooperation between the ministries of the interior, foreign affairs and defence. At the EU level,

solutions for the refugee crisis and ensuring security of people are dealt in the EU Directorate General of Home Affairs and in the European External Action Service.

## **Debate**

Vice President of the Euronest PA, Member of the Georgian Parliament **Victor Dolidze** informed that in October 2015 meeting of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly was held. During the meeting, important issues in regard to further format of cooperation were discussed.

The events in Paris on 13 November, demonstrated how important are security matters. Cooperation needs to be enhanced in order to fight against terrorists and ensure security of the European borders. The Eastern Partnership is not only a consumer of the EU policy, but also a contributor. Georgia is an active partner of the EU in fight against terrorism. Soldiers of Georgia have been in Iraq, Pakistan, Mali and will be anywhere where it will be necessary. During these operations 31 Georgian soldiers have been killed. Georgia is proud for these soldiers, because they are securing not only Georgia, but also Europe.

Visa free liberalisation regime is particularly important for Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. These countries represent European values and consider themselves as part of the European region.

The war in Ukraine is not about intervention, it is a war against sovereign and democratic country. Therefore, Ukraine needs support.

Through the new European Neighbourhood Policy, the EU works with its southern and eastern neighbours to achieve the closest possible political association and the greatest possible degree of economic integration. The five pillars of the work that has started are: 1) focus on economic development and job creation; 2) cooperation on energy; 3) security; 4) migration; 5) neighbours of the neighbours. The fifth pillar represents the wish to strengthen the resilience of partner countries and effectively work towards common purposes. Proper internal conditions will provide a good fundament for external and integration processes.

Chair of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee **Bronius Pauža** noted that the Baltic States have adopted commitments in regard to the refugee quotas. He asked about possibility of the Baltic States to invest in activities that are targeted to identify the real refugees from economic migrants and terrorists.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Artūras Norkevičius** noted that one of the best EU achievements is the free movement of persons. Nevertheless, strict measures to protect the EU Member States from illegal migrants should be developed. Therefore, responsible institutions from each Member State need to cooperate closer. One of solutions is to temporarily renew the internal border control within the EU. However, this decision is to be taken by the heads of states.

In regard to migrant flows, Greece and Italy need to provide a list of migrants that will be presented to the Baltic States. The flow of migrants will depend on the needs of labour market. Only after conclusion of certain procedures, migrants will be received in the Baltic States. The responsible institutions will carefully inspect all identities of migrants.

Senior Adviser to the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Estonia **Väino Linde** informed that Estonia has sent an official to Italy to start preliminary screening of refugees that will be sent to Estonia. Estonia has also sent a Police Mission to Slovenia in order to assist Slovenian border guards managing the flow of refugees.

Parliamentary State Secretary, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Latvia **Evika Siliņa** informed that criteria for assigning the status of asylum is very important. Along with identification done on the EU borders, Latvia will have internal identification that will decrease possible number of illegal immigrants.

Chair of the GUAM PA, Member of the Verkhovna Rada, Head of Ukrainian Permanent delegation **Anatoliy Matviyenko** informed that from the point of Russia situation in the Middle East and refugee crisis helps to implement very important and cynical assignment – to review the existing EU value system. Therefore, one should not limit itself to see the overall perspective in regard to the crisis in Ukraine.

Russia considers that Western countries lack determination and financial means to coordinate actions against evolving challenges. Already, in the beginning of the crisis in Ukraine, President of Russia should have received a strong warning providing that the EU will apply every measure to stop the aggression. Unfortunately, it was not delivered

Public opinion in Russia provides that there is no such country as Ukraine. Russians believe that Ukraine belongs to Russia. One day of war in Ukraine costs 365 million Ukrainian Hryvnias and it is EUR 14 million. Russia is waiting for the collapse of the EU policy. If the EU would have a clear security policy, Russia might act differently.

Members of the EU need to discuss whether it is possible to ensure the security of the EU without security of Ukraine. Russia should be punished for its actions.

He quoted Russian analyst: “Today, the situation of Russia is neither weak nor strong. It is fragile and such situation could last for years or end on the next Thursday.” Territorial integrity of Ukraine needs to be preserved. Unfortunately, time is not an ally. If the situation in Ukraine will not be resolved, Ukraine will lose a large part of its territory.

Member of Presidium, Vice Chair of the Lithuanian delegation **Rytas Kupčinskas** asked about cooperation of the Baltic States security structures in difficult situations and about future joint trainings.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Artūras Norkevičius** informed that all security structures of the Baltic States are closely cooperating. Frequent joint meetings and trainings are being held. In the beginning of 2016, in Latvia next meeting between the Ministers of Interior of the Baltic States will be held. During the meeting, ministers will discuss matters related with the external security.

Senior Adviser to the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Estonia **Väino Linde** informed that recently in Estonia security structures participated in a training during which was held a simulation when electricity and all communications do not work. It is planned to repeat similar simulations.

Parliamentary State Secretary, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Latvia **Evika Siliņa** informed that also at ministerial level the role of strategic cooperation has been emphasized. In Latvia trainings for law enforcement agencies, National Armed Forces and state officials are held. Each service organises also trainings and exercises together with related services from Lithuania and Estonia.

Member of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee **Raimundas Paliukas** noted that the Baltic States would benefit if a joint training centre would be established. He informed that on 18 November 2015, one man managed to deceive two Lithuanian Police Officers and take a machine gun from one Police Officer. The man was captured after two hours. He asked about possible cooperation scenarios if similar situation, but with larger terrorist groups simultaneously would occur in the Baltic States.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Artūras Norkevičius** noted that this event does not represent inability of security system. Security institutions of the Baltic States are ready to respond to individual and coordinated terroristic incidents.

Vice Chair of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee **Veiko Spolitis** noted that the EU is an unfinished project and it is not able to change dynamically along with the evolving challenges. Because in order to react to a particular challenge all Member States need to agree and that takes time. The EU has one neighbour in the opposite side of Narva and Zilupe rivers, who is continuously breaching international law – Helsinki 1975 Final Act, Paris Charter 1990, Budapest Declaration, Constitution of Ukraine, and Constitution of Russian Federation. The EU should continue to deter Russia with sanctions. Annexation of Crimea and Russia's military activities in Donbas as well in Sevastopol are unacceptable. The EU and NATO cooperation needs to be strengthened, therefore EU Member States need to fulfil their agreements and obligations in regard to security as well as other important sectors.

The new EU Convention bringing Member States closer to federal system needs to be adopted. Moreover, discussions about the EU citizen duties need to be started, because in order to provide liberties people need to understand also the limits of their performance. This is closely connected with the increasing terrorism problems and illegal migration. Perhaps, the Human Rights Convention is too liberal, if it is so easy

to breach it. If there are EU citizens, who join *Da'esh* in Syria and Iraq, perhaps, discussions about deportation of their family members should be started. These questions need to be raised, because these problems will remain for the next decades.

Parliamentary State Secretary, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Latvia **Evika Siliņa** informed that, unfortunately, several individuals joined trainings of Russian forces in Ukraine. After this event, discussions about applying penalties for such activities were held.

Ministries of the Baltic States are actively discussing solutions in regard to refugee quotas and security measures that should be applied.

Member of the Presidium, Vice Chair of the Latvian delegation **Romualds Ražuks** noted that the EU is ineffective in securing external borders. During the Latvian Presidency in the Council of Europe, it was proposed to have Passenger Name Record data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime. This initiative is not continued by the Luxembourg Presidency in the Council of Europe and European Parliament, the reason for that is the questionable infringement of the human rights. Following this argumentation, it could be said that the United Kingdom, Australia and United States of America breach the human rights by having a passenger name records.

However, considering the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, general part of society holds an opinion that it is safer to be outside the EU. The EU is not safeguarding its borders efficiently. This should be changed and the EU Passenger Name Register should be enforced.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Artūras Norkevičius** noted that Schengen Area provides numerous benefits. The EU has been working on Passenger Name Record Directive for already 7 years. The Baltic States need to work together to continue this political initiative and convince the European Parliament. Security of people needs to be ensured and it is also a part of human rights.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee **Jānis Ādamsons** asked about the possible reasons that trigger people to join Russian forces or radical

terrorism movements and whether the Baltic States have joint Action Plan to deal with people that come back afterwards.

Parliamentary State Secretary, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Latvia **Evika Siliņa** informed that in Latvia there is no analysis in regard to dealing with people who return from warfare. Unfortunately, there is no clear answer on why they are joining these activities and how to prevent people to join such activities.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Artūras Norkevičius** informed that in Lithuania there is no analysis in regard to dealing with people who return from warfare. There is no information that people from Lithuania would have joined military operations in Syria.

Senior Adviser to the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Estonia **Väino Linde** informed that according to press reports; one person from Estonia has joined the ISIS group. Two criminal procedures have been started against persons who supported those who left Estonia to join ISIC group. Reasons why persons join such military groups are mostly individual and personal or connected with family beliefs.

Member of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee **Kārlis Krēslīņš** asked about education requirements for staff members having uniform in the Baltic States Ministries of Interior.

Senior Adviser to the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Estonia **Väino Linde** noted that Police Officers in the Baltic States have similar ranking and training systems that are in accordance with the EU requirements.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Artūras Norkevičius** informed that Frontex has confirmed the module of education for border guards, which is common to all EU Member States.

The EU has agency dedicated to provide training and learning opportunities to law enforcement officers on issues vital for the security of the EU and its citizens - CEPOL. Training covers topics ranging from leadership to law enforcement techniques and from EU cooperation to economic crime. Activities are designed to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices and to contribute to the



development of a common European law enforcement culture as well as to decrease the gap between the efficiency police trainings between the Member States.

Parliamentary State Secretary, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Latvia **Evika Siliņa** informed that in Latvia the firefighter, police and border guards have common trainings and exercises. The Baltic States do not have single training centre.

Senior Adviser to the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Estonia **Väino Linde** informed that in May 2015 fast command trainings were held in Estonia. During the training a scenario of a terrorist attack and hostage taking was played. In this training participated police forces from different countries.

Member of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee **Kārlis Krēslīšs** asked about the trainings that need to be acquired in order to receive a lieutenant position and a master degree.

Vice Minister, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Artūras Norkevičius** informed that in order to acquire a degree particular trainings need to be finished in Lithuania.

Vice President, Chair of the Latvian delegation **Jānis Vucāns** informed that since 1994 education system in the Baltic States provides that in order to receive a degree particular trainings need to be finished.

<b>Continuation of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly</b>
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Vice President of the Nordic Council **Ólína Kjerúlf Þorvarðardóttir** noted that it is a special moment to be present in the Session of the Baltic Assembly. In 1991, Iceland gave admittance and supported the independence of Lithuania.

Independence, peace and good relations between the nations cannot be taken for granted. Events in Ukraine drastically changed the situation in Europe. The crisis in Ukraine has given the Nordic region, the Baltic States and Poland reason to strengthen cooperation. Last year, after the annexation of Crimea, Presidium of the Nordic Council visited the Parliament of Poland. The purpose of visit was to express support of the Nordic Council to countries in difficult situation. The Nordic Council consulted

with partners - the Baltic Assembly and Poland – to learn about concerns and challenges.

After the annexation of Crimea, Europe and Russia are different, so are the international relations. It is not possible to return to the relations that existed before the events in Ukraine. Therefore, new solutions for cooperation need to be found. Closer cooperation between the Baltic and Nordic countries is beneficial and a necessary contribution for finding possible solutions to evolving challenges. The Nordic Council will be more east oriented and will focus on the EU Eastern cooperation. The Nordic Council has always supported Belarus and since 2007, joint seminars in Belarus have been organised jointly with the Baltic States. The next seminar will be organised in December 2015.

Members of the Nordic Council are aware that the Baltic Assembly has good relations with Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. Due to the events in Ukraine, the Nordic Council will also try to enhance relations with Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. In the forthcoming years, the Baltic Assembly and Nordic Council will need to continue to strengthen cooperation, prepare for new meetings and joint discussions. International cooperation is of utmost importance and is a precondition for the welfare in the Baltic-Nordic regions.

Chair of the Belgian delegation of the Benelux Parliament **Jef Van den Bergh** informed that regional cooperation frameworks can bring added value to necessary domestic policies. Cooperation within the transport connections, cybersecurity and joint medical projects have been also discussed in the Benelux Parliament.

Development of joint transport infrastructure project is very important. Particular attention should be added to cross border links, which provide high added value. The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project will ensure environmentally friendly land connection between the Baltic States and other European countries. One of the missing links is the link between the port of Antwerp and the German Ruhr area – *Iron Rhine* -, which has not been used for 25 years. Development of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project is in the interests of the Benelux countries. It would increase efficiency of railway transport between the Benelux and Baltic countries. On 29 June 2015, the European Commission has selected the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* and the *Iron Rhine* projects. Funding for both projects will be allocated from the Connecting Europe Facility.

It is important that cooperation between Benelux and Baltic countries is continued. In 2013 and 2014, two conferences about security were held. Both conferences were attended by delegation from the Baltic States, which shared best practices and practical information. In June 2014, the Benelux Parliament adopted recommendation asking to establish an expert group on cybersecurity for the public and private sector. Governments of the Benelux countries were also invited to increase cooperation in cybersecurity to establish common sanction mechanisms and join forces in order to implement Directive 2013/40/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 August 2013 on attack against Information Systems.

In Resolution adopted in 2014, the Baltic Assembly called on governments of the Baltic States to develop an Action Plan for coordinated implementation of Directive 2011/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2011 on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare. In Resolution, the Baltic Assembly also called on governments to develop an Action Plan for single e-Health system in the Baltic States. The Benelux Parliament has started discussions on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare and e-Health system; further work will be continued also in 2016.

Defence cooperation is becoming more important. The EU Member States need to strengthen their cooperation in foreign and security policy. During the Belgium Presidency in the Council of Europe, former Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs emphasised the importance of military cooperation at the EU level. On December 2010, the Ghent framework was adopted exploring the feasibility of intensified EU cooperation regarding military capabilities such as straining, logistics, medical transportation and communications. Since 2010, the EU Member States have developed initiatives for better military cooperation. On 27 March 2015, in Benelux parliament a plenary debate on military cooperation was held. During the debate, former Latvian Defence Minister Raimonds Vējonis was invited to present the experience of the Baltic States.

Topics discussed within the Session of the Baltic Assembly, correspond issues discussed also in the Benelux Parliament. These topics correspond the interest of the EU and facilitate internal security. If the Baltic Assembly, Benelux Parliament and Nordic Council join forces, even greater influence at the EU level decision-making

processes could be achieved. Therefore, further cooperation and joint activities should be continued.

Chair of the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly, Head of the Ukrainian delegation to the GUAM PA **Anatoliy Matviyenko** expressed appreciation to the Baltic Assembly for support to the GUAM PA and Ukraine in particular. Ukraine paid an expensive price for choosing the European way. Nevertheless, this decision has not been regretted.

Delegations from the Baltic Assembly, Benelux Parliament and the Nordic Council are welcomed to participate in meetings of the GUAM PA.

Chair of the Georgian delegation to the GUAM PA **Zurab Abashidze** cited Aristotle, “Wishing to be friends is quick work, but friendship is a slow ripening fruit.” The Baltic Assembly and GUAM PA have done a lot to bring nations closer to each other. However, stronger ties to build bridges of friendship with other European nations is even greater challenge. Between the Baltic States and Georgia, exist strong cooperation ties that are felt at every level of cooperation. The Statement condemning the occupation and attempt to annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by the Russian Federation is an example of special and close relations between the Baltic States and Georgia. Georgia highly appreciates the strong support of the Baltic States in regard to Georgia’s European choice and contribution for further advancing relations with the EU. Georgia is committed to finalise Visa liberalisation dialogue with the EU. It is expected that the next report by the EU Commission is going to be issued by the end of 2015.

It is important to continue seminars on security. The send meeting of thematic seminars was organised by Ukraine Delegates from the Baltic Assembly, Nordic Council, Benelux Parliament, Visegrad group and GUAMP PA participated in the seminar. Trainings of the GUAM PA Secretaries in the Baltic States has increased the level of knowledge, organisational cooperation and dialogue between the GUAM PA and the Baltic Assembly.

## Report of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly

President of the Baltic Assembly **Giedrė Purvaneckienė** informed that the reports on committee activities in 2015 will be available in the written form on the Baltic Assembly's website after the Session. Members of the Lithuanian delegation believe that the Baltic Assembly is one of the most successful Baltic cooperation platforms. Parliamentarians of the Baltic States jointly implemented priorities, goals and task of the Lithuanian Presidency in the Baltic Assembly.

When last year Lithuanian Presidency started its work, it was promised to do utmost to implement three main ideas in life. The first idea was to do everything to focus on the Baltic interparliamentary cooperation, on areas that can increase growth of Baltic region and welfare of Baltic nations. Doing nothing in this regard is not an option. The second idea Lithuanian Presidency was the following - learn from mistakes. The third idea is to act together as a group of neighbours and a group of states concerned about the future of the international community and the world.

Agenda of the cooperation was filled up with issues, which aim to increase integrity, security and sustainability of the Region. Members of the Committees jointly with governmental representatives, experts, business representatives and international partners the Baltic Assembly elaborated recommendations in regard to joint measures to promote growth and increase of employment, joint procurements in military sector, in regard to the development of strategically important transport and infrastructure projects, economic cooperation as well as joint health care projects. One of the tasks for the Baltic Assembly next year will be to ensure intense parliamentary oversight of implementation of these recommendations.

Members of the Baltic Assembly managed not to repeat the mistakes of past. Where many excellent opportunities were missed while fiercely competing for investments, better ratings on international markets or being the first to join European and transatlantic organisations. By assessing the work of the Baltic Assembly for the last almost 12 months, it can be said that Baltic parliamentarians were working without "hidden knife of competition" in their minds or behind their back. Open cooperation process and open discussions were held considering the best solutions to the challenges.

It needs to be remembered that any process and started action takes time to provide results. Joint education or research projects cannot be implemented already in the next year after signing of any Letter of Intent or Memorandum of Understanding. Coordination processes might be lengthy within one single institution; coordination process is even lengthier if several institutions of three countries are involved. From the perspective and tasks of the Baltic Assembly, parliamentarians need to be more demanding, persistent and vigorous.

In 2015, the Baltic Assembly closely monitored the follow-up activities of the Baltic Council of Ministers on the recommendations of the Baltic Assembly for last 3 years. National delegations have received the report on the implementation status of the recommendations. Governments of the Baltic States have been implemented recommendations of the Baltic Assembly for 85% - 90%. Of course, the aim is to achieve 100%. Closer cooperation between the governments of the Baltic States is needed in regard to the joint procurements in health-care, specialisation of medical centres, promotion of exports and joint marketing activities of different sectors, joint study programmes for vocational and higher education.

Development of Baltic cooperation is in the hands of each parliamentarian. Each Member of the Baltic Assembly needs to act. Success of the Baltic cooperation depends on each parliamentarian gathered here for the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly.

Relations with the Nordic Council and Benelux Parliament are close, friendly and open. Cooperation channels are built also with the Visegrad countries and South East European countries. Better coordination of policies, effective actions in different fields of mutual interest are needed to meet global challenges and promote growth and stability in the Region.

This year, the Baltic Assembly had fruitful parliamentary meetings about security issues and the EU Eastern Partnership with international partners. Messages of the Baltic Assembly were heard and received in the EU Eastern Partnership Summit by the Heads of the Summit. Recently, messages were shared also with Members of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly.

Jointly with the Nordic Council, the Baltic Assembly continue to strengthen the Baltic – Nordic parliamentary influence at the EU. Voice of the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council on the EU issues has to be louder. By pooling resources, it is possible to form a group of European frontrunners in research, smart technologies and growth.

Jointly with the Benelux Parliament, the Baltic Assembly will continue fight against the social fraud. Jointly with international partners the work on the integration of refugees, cooperation in research and education, energy security, labour market and other issues of mutual interest will be continued. Jointly support to partners of the GUAM countries needs to be provided.

Chair of the Budget and Audit Committee **Irena Degutienė** introduced with the implementation of the Budget of the Baltic Assembly 2014 and draft Budget of the Baltic Assembly 2016, which has been submitted for consideration to all Members of the Baltic Assembly.

Members of Budget and Audit Committee and Presidium have examined implementation of draft report of the Budget of the Baltic Assembly in 2014. Source of the Baltic Assembly budget in 2014 were the membership fees from the national parliaments of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia in amount of EUR 274,140. In 2014, there was also a Presidency Fund in amount of EUR 51,493.

According to the report, EUR 317,800 has been used to ensure the work of the Baltic Assembly in 2014. As some of the planned events have been postponed to 2015, residual part of the budget has been included in the Budget of 2015. Budget of the Baltic Assembly has been used to ensure the following activities of the Baltic Assembly: 1) international parliamentary seminars of the Presidium and Committees; 2) cooperation with the Nordic Council, the Benelux Parliament, the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly as well as participation in the work of the Standing Committee of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference; 3) organisation of the Session and the Baltic Council; 4) Baltic Assembly Prizes in Literature, the Arts and Science and the Baltic Innovation Prize; 5) the Secretariat; 6) a special position – Presidency Fund, which was spent for marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baltic Way and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baltic Assembly Prizes. Detailed report on the expenses in all budgetary positions is available in draft documents, which have been submitted to all Members of the Baltic Assembly.

In the beginning of the financial crisis, it was decided to decrease expenses for more than 20%, since then the level of the Budget has not been changed.

Membership payments of the national parliaments of the Baltic States will remain at the same level as since 2009 and will amount to EUR 91,380. With the decision of the Presidium and the Budget and Audit Committee, funding has been transferred in amount of EUR 11,800 from the BA Budget 2015 to the BA Budget 2016.

Latvian Presidency programme was used as the basis for the Baltic Assembly Budget for 2016. The total of the Baltic Assembly Budget for 2016 is EUR 285,940. The main budgetary positions are the following: 1) the 35<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Baltic Council, expenses of which have been calculated EUR 38,000. This position remains at the same level as for 2015; 2) for the work of the Baltic Assembly Presidium it was agreed to allocate EUR 12,660. This position has been decreased by 4.5% compared to 2015; 3) for the internal meetings of the Budget and Audit Committee it has been agreed to allocate EUR 500. This position remains at the same level as for 2015; 4) for the international cooperation we have allocated EUR 93,187, which is 34 % of the total BA Budget; 5) for the medals of the Baltic Assembly, basketball tournament and the website it has been agreed to allocate EUR 13,733; 6) for the Baltic Assembly Prizes in Literature, the Arts and Science and the Baltic Innovation prize it has been agreed to allocate EUR 54,052; 7) for the Secretariat of the Baltic Assembly it was agreed to allocate EUR 73, 208. Unplanned expenses amount to EUR 600. Detailed overview on the estimated expenses is in draft documents, which have been submitted to all Members of the Baltic Assembly.

President of the Baltic Assembly **Giedrė Purvaneckienė** introduced to the draft documents, which have been submitted to the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly:

- Resolution of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly, which contains recommendations of the Baltic Assembly in regard to the cooperation in security and defence, cybersecurity, energy sector, transport and infrastructure, economic cooperation as well as joint health care projects.
- Decision on the implementation of the Report of the Budget of the Baltic Assembly for 2014. Chair of the Budget and Audit Committee **Irena Degutienė** has already introduced with this report.



- Decision on the Budget of the Baltic Assembly for 2016. Chair of the Budget and Audit Committee **Irena Degutienė** has already introduced with the Budget.
- Final document of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly in which the Baltic Assembly defined priorities for the next year under Latvian Presidency.

With unanimous decision, the Baltic Assembly adopted the following documents of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly:

- Resolution of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- Decision on the implementation of the Report of the Budget of the Baltic Assembly for 2014;
- Decision on the Budget of the Baltic Assembly for 2016;
- Final document of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly.

#### **Election of the President and Vice Presidents for 2016**

Members of the Baltic Assembly unanimously adopted the following leadership of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly:

- President of the Baltic Assembly: Jānis Vucāns, Latvia
- Vice President of the Baltic Assembly: Giedrė Purvaneckienė, Lithuania
- Vice President of the Baltic Assembly: Helir-Valdor Seeder, Estonia

#### **Election of the Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons of the committees for 2016**

Members of the Baltic Assembly unanimously adopted the following leadership of the Committees of the Baltic Assembly:

Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee

- Atis Lejiņš, Chair, Latvia
- Bronius Pauža, Vice Chair, Lithuania
- Toomas Kivimägi, Vice Chair, Estonia

#### Education, Science and Culture Committee

- Juris Viļums, Chair, Latvia
- Valerijus Simulik, Vice Chair, Lithuania
- Krista Aru, Vice Chair, Estonia

#### Natural Resources and Environment Committee

- Veiko Spolītis, Chair, Latvia
- Paulius Saudargas, Vice Chair, Lithuania
- Rainer Vakra, Vice Chair, Estonia

#### Legal Affairs and Security Committee

- Jānis Ādamsons, Chair, Latvia
- Virginija Baltraitienė, Vice Chair, Lithuania
- Heljo Pikhof, Vice Chair, Estonia

#### Welfare Committee

- Imants Parādnieks, Chair, Latvia
- Jolita Vaickienė, Vice Chair, Lithuania
- Aivar Kokk, Vice Chair, Estonia

#### Budget and Audit Committee

- Sergejs Potapkins, Chair, Latvia
- Irena Degutienė, Vice Chair, Lithuania
- Toomas Kivimägi, Vice Chair, Estonia

<b>Address by the newly elected President of the Baltic Assembly</b>
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Vice President, Chair of the Latvian delegation **Jānis Vucāns** noted that parliamentarians of the Baltic States have made important steps towards better cooperation in such sectors as economy, security, transport and other areas. The motto of the Baltic States cooperation can be described: “higher, farther, better”. Having reviewed the implementation of the Baltic Assembly recommendations, it can be concluded that decisions have not just ended up in nice folders collecting dust on shelves somewhere. The decisions of the Baltic Assembly have been, indeed,

implemented in a dedicated and responsible manner. The Baltic States had joint research projects. The Baltic States are addressing international organisations in one voice - the Baltic voice. The Baltic States have common tourism marketing projects. And have been able to leave differences behind, come together and agree on common interests and forget the internal rivalry.

The Latvian parliament and delegation will assume the Baltic Assembly presidency with full sense of responsibility and strong regional awareness. The Latvian delegation began active preparations for the upcoming presidency and took up drafting of the presidency programme as early as this spring. Latvian delegates started with a round of meetings with stakeholders, including the Latvian prime minister, ministers, professional associations, to identify the most challenging sectors that are currently facing internal and external risks, as well as to benefit from the opportunities offered to them. These sectors require Baltic countries to consolidate our efforts and resources.

The executive branch was involved in very early stages of the planning process. Closer coordination with the Baltic Council of Ministers plays an immense role in ensuring representation of the common interests of the region, as well as comprehensive and inclusive regional cooperation. One of the priorities of the Latvian Presidency is to ensure that the Baltic parliaments and governments implement an increasingly inclusive and cohesive policy. Cooperation that promotes regional growth and stability, benefiting the people of the Baltic States. Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, gave a clear message today while addressing the Baltic Council of Ministers: the Latvian Presidency of the Baltic Assembly will work hand in hand with the Baltic Council of Ministers.

The Baltic Assembly is an equal partnership between three countries, united by common interests, objectives and values. The priorities of the Latvian presidency are not only Latvia's priorities. These priorities belong to all of Baltic countries, for they are rooted in shared world vision, common interests and objectives such as: first, safe and secure Baltic region. We will make sure that our countries are safer and more engaged in strategic communication. Second, a united Baltic region strengthening cooperation in higher education, research, culture and other areas. Third, open Baltic

region. The Baltic Assembly continue its efforts in building a single entrepreneurship environment across the Baltics.

The programme for the Latvian Presidency has already been circulated among you. It contains a detailed description of activities that will be addressed by the Baltic Assembly over the next year. Please read it and get actively involved in implementing this agenda!

Year 2016 is a special year for the Baltic parliamentary cooperation as celebrations of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baltic Assembly will be held. The Baltic countries and the international environment has changed considerably over this quarter of a century. When you reach a milestone of this sort, you usually look back at the road you have walked. Baltic countries have made tremendous achievements both individually and collectively. However, even more needs to be achieved by 2018 when Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania will celebrate their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversaries. The Baltic States need to consolidate efforts to ensure that citizens live in a safe, open, reliable and united Baltic region. The Baltic Assembly has proposed one of such efforts, the creation of a joint Baltic export marketing campaign targeting international markets or the Baltic brand: *100 years of experience*. Learn more about this initiative and to get actively involved.

He emphasised that taking over the presidency in the Baltic Assembly is a great honour for Latvia. The Baltic Assembly's team is compound of highly accountable, enthusiastic and dedicated committee members from the Seimas, Riigikogu and the Saeima as well as strong cooperation with the Baltic Council of Ministers and international partners in the Nordic Council, the Benelux Parliament, GUAM Parliamentary Assembly and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Signing of the Final Document of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly</b></p>
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President of the Baltic Assembly **Giedrė Purvaneckienė** announced that the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly is closed. National delegations were invited for signing the Final Document of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly.

President of  
the Baltic Assembly

Vice President of  
the Baltic Assembly

Member of the Presidium of  
the Baltic Assembly

**Giedrė Purvaneckienė**  
Republic of Lithuania

**Jānis Vucāns**  
Republic of Latvia

**Aadu Must**  
Republic of Estonia

**Marika Laizāne-Jurkāne**  
Secretary General of the Baltic Assembly

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