



Report of the
35th Session of the Baltic Assembly and 22nd Baltic Council
27-28 October 2016, Rīga (Latvia)

1. Presiding officers of the Session:

- **Jānis Vucāns**, President, Chair of the Latvian delegation, Latvia
- **Helir Valdor-Seeder**, Vice President, Chair of the Estonian delegation, Estonia
- **Giedrė Purvaneckienė**, Vice President, Chair of the Lithuanian delegation, Lithuania

2. Agenda of the Session:

- Meeting of the Presidium of the BA and the Speakers of the national parliaments;
- Meetings of the Education, Science and Culture Committee;
- Meeting of the Natural Resources Committee;
- Meeting of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee;
- Meeting of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee;
- Meeting of the Welfare Committee;
- Opening of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- Award ceremony of the Medals of the Baltic Assembly;
- Opening of the 22nd Baltic Council;
- Signing of the Joint Statement of the 22nd Baltic Council;
- Continuation of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- Session 1: Migration and EU external borders management: new challenges and joint solutions for the Baltic States;
- Session 2: Demographic situation in the Baltic States and state policy for family support: investments into welfare and growth;
- Session 3: Joint actions for development of regional transport infrastructure of the Baltic States;
- Adoption of the Resolution and Final Document of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly;

- Election of the President and Vice Presidents of the Baltic Assembly for 2017;
- Election of the Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons of the Committees;
- Address by the newly elected President of the Baltic Assembly for 2017;
- Signing of the Final Document of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly.

Opening of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** opened the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly. This Session is special for the Baltic cooperation as it marks the 25th anniversary of the Baltic Assembly. He quoted Prof. Andres Kasekamp: “the Baltic Assembly cooperation today is more topical than ever before. The Baltic cooperation has been always criticized as insufficient and inadequate. However, the Baltic Assembly has been and continues to be the cornerstone of cooperation. I am completely sure that in coming years the Baltic Assembly will continue to serve as important cornerstone of the Baltic cooperation.”

He expressed gratitude for Speakers of Parliaments, Ministers, parliamentarians, experts and foreign guests for participation in the Session.

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 **Jānis Vucāns** underlined that the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly includes important issues for the Baltic States. The session is divided in three thematic sessions. Firstly, migration and the EU external borders management. Particular focus will be on new challenges and joint solutions for the Baltic States, including discussions on refugee crisis, closer cooperation of border guard services, possible new routes for refugee flows and border protection. Secondly, demographic situation in the Baltic States and state policy for family support. Thirdly, joint actions for development of regional transport infrastructure of the Baltic States. Within this session, the capacity of the Baltic States to develop the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project, transport corridors, initiating of new projects and cross border cooperation will be analysed.

The session of the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council will also include discussions on how the Baltic States can improve cooperation with the Nordic countries. During the session, the EU Eastern Partnership, the future of the EU as whole, coordination of joint Baltic position within the EU, strategic cooperation, improvement of media environment, energy market and joint education and science projects will be discussed. The session will evaluate the Latvian Presidency in the Baltic Assembly and Baltic Council of Ministers and how the priorities set at the beginning of presidency have been implemented.

The 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly and the 22nd Baltic Council has very intense agenda. The Baltic States politicians share political determination to solve the outstanding issues of the Baltic countries and promote national growth and prosperity. He expressed personal gratitude to Speaker of Saeima, Ināra Mūrniece, President of the Riigikogu, Eiki Nestor and Speaker of Seimas, Loreta Graužinienė for their strong and targeted support of the Baltic Assembly and the political commitment to promote parliamentary cooperation in the Baltic countries.

He expressed gratitude to Speaker of Saeima, Ināra Mūrniece for support in implementing the Latvian Presidency of the Baltic Assembly. Speaker of Saeima has participated in several meetings of the Baltic Assembly including meeting on joint master's program for Baltic law enforcement officers, meeting on the protection of European values in joint information space and strengthening of the media in the region, prevention of hybrid threats, as well as the NATO-EU strategic reorientation within the Baltic perspective.

Speaker of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia **Ināra Mūrniece** informed that during the Award Ceremony of the Baltic Assembly Prizes Janīna Kursīte noted that the Baltic Way cannot take place every single day. Indeed, such unique event may not be held daily.

Today, the Baltic States need to implement practical projects through mutual understanding and cooperation. The 25th anniversary of the Baltic Assembly reminds about how it is important to take advantage of opportunities that are given. In the beginning on 90's the Baltic States used the opportunity to break away from the Soviet

Union and do it jointly. Today, the Baltic States have to safeguard achieved values. In critical situations, people expect political leaders to act decisively. People expect to have safety, ensured welfare and education possibilities for their children. The Baltic Assembly is working on with these issues.

The main priority of the Baltic Assembly is security of the region. The decisions of the NATO Warsaw Summit are achievement of the Baltic States. Currently, the work is focused on introduction of the NATO multinational battle groups that will be brought in the Baltic States. Another important issue is allocation of 2% of GDP to defence and the work is continued on joint improvement of defence infrastructure in the Baltic States. In order to implement all these policies, the Baltic States need to efficiently use the available resources and achieve wide public support.

Russia will continue to provoke and will continue to maintain opinion that the NATO is escalating the situation in the region. The Baltic States need to fight this with truth and make society to understand that the NATO is actually the guarantor of security and Russia is escalating the situation.

The Baltic Assembly adds particular attention on strategic cooperation. The Baltic States need to continue active cooperation and seek solutions to fight against hybrid threats. The Baltic States need support from the public media and various public authorities. Close cooperation's needs to be maintained between the border guards of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Joint Master's education programme for border guards and law enforcement employees is very important.

Transport and energy is another major priority for the Baltic Council of Ministers. Experience shows that disruptions in energy supplies is one of the methods used in the hybrid war. The Baltic States need to continue integration of the Baltic Region in the European Energy Network. Opening of the Latvian Gas market in 2017 will be an important step towards integration process.

Regardless of various complications regarding the *Rail Baltic/ Rail Baltica* railway project, the Baltic States have managed to conclude contract on financing and implementation of the project. This shows that the Baltic States are capable of

implementing major projects together. The *Rail Baltic/ Rail Baltica* railway project is an important element in maintenance of the regions security.

International society needs to stand strong against Russia's aggression in Ukraine. International pressure on Russia should not be decreased until Minsk Agreements are fully fulfilled.

Speakers and government representatives of the Baltic and Nordic countries could visit Minsk in February 2017 to show solidarity and political support.

In the spring of 2017, Speakers of the Baltic and Nordic countries plan on visiting Georgia. The support for Eastern Partnership countries of the EU should continue.

Speaker of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia expressed gratitude to Estonia for its commitment to organise the next Eastern Partnership Summit in 2017, when Estonia will take over the Presidency in the Council of the EU. In preparation of this event, constant policy in regard to the Eastern Partnership needs to be remained.

Marking the 25th anniversary of the Baltic Assembly, it needs to be remembered that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are much stronger while working together. History has shown that the Baltic States can survive any challenges while standing together.

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** informed that next year the Presidency of the Baltic Assembly will be held by Estonia. Due to the fact that Estonia will also held the Presidency in the Council of the EU, the next year will be especially busy.

President of the Riigikogu of the Republic of Estonia **Eiki Nestor** noted that the large attendance of the session is a sign that the Baltic cooperation continues to be meaningful and mutually beneficial. This year the Baltic Assembly celebrates the 25th anniversary. On 8 November 1991, the foundation for the trilateral cooperation of the Baltic parliaments was laid with the agreement signed in Tallinn. The aim was to strengthen parliamentary relations in order to work together towards achieving important domestic and foreign policy goals. Taking all the experience with popular movements from 80's and 90's the Baltic Assembly began, collectively speaking, "as a backbone" of the

Baltic States and as a valuable forum of democratic cooperation. In 25 years, the Baltic States have gone a long way – have built up States with a human face and returned to European and transatlantic communities. In just one generation, reforms that have changed political, economic and social system have been achieved. Turning from Soviet social model into Western democracy has required intense work. On the highway of reforms, there were also accidents and not everything has gone easily and smoothly. However, there is no room for complaints, because freedom is the most valuable treasure and its price can never be too high.

In 25 years, the world has changed beyond recognition. The key words - constructiveness and flexibility - describing successful cooperation in the Baltic Assembly have also changed. It is impossible to work as 10, 15 or 20 years ago, the Baltic States must be more proactive and efficient, ready to react more forcefully to situations that require it. The changes in security situation in Europe rushes aggressive foreign policy and insolent demonstrations of strength in our space and seas. It leads to no doubt, that independence of the Baltic States is no longer as natural as it was a dozen years ago. The Baltic States should continue efforts to make the voice of freedom. The decisions of the NATO in Warsaw Summit may show the way on this. Another great challenge - the EU is on crossroads today. When at the midsummer's night Europe was unexpectedly hit by the news on Brexit. Now, we must think how to restore the feeling of security to our common home. European citizens need assurance that the home is protected and we will not be overrun by disrespectful strangers.

Discussion about the future of the Union has started. Let us keep our finger on the pulse so we can defend our rights and interests together. The Baltic States should not be afraid of being pioneers. Safe living environment, sustainable infrastructure and energy policy, innovative education and knowledge based economy are our common interests. In the corridors of Brussels, it has been heard that people ask whether we need more EU or less.

Regarding the Baltic cooperation, everything is clear, there can never be too much of it. In 25 years, The Baltic States have achieved more together than could ever achieve separately. The Baltic Assembly's youth and the pains of the past are growing. The time has come to be ready for new challenges. The effectiveness and the influence of

the organisation increase significantly when we refer to the direct cooperation of the parliamentary committees. This way the problems reach those who have the authority to provide solutions whether in the field of security or competitiveness. The Baltic Assembly is like the city of Tallinn that will never be completed according to the legend. Whatever the future holds, the fundamental values that unite the Baltic States are there and will always be there. Similar historic experience, common values and traditions create a strong basis for cooperation in a spirit of true parliamentarianism.

Next year in 2017, Estonia will take over the Presidency in the Baltic Assembly. The aim is consistent development of the region. Therefore, Estonian Presidency will tend to continue with issues that have been important for previous years.

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** underlined that Parliament of Lithuania has been and continues to be a strong cornerstone of the Baltic cooperation.

Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania **Loreta Graužinienė** underlined that for 25 years, the Baltic Assembly has been fostering the unity and cooperation of the Baltic nations and offering an opportunity to discuss often complicated, but urgent matters related to common problems related with economic, political or security challenges. Indeed, the security situation is a major cause of concern. The neighbouring Russia continues its aggressive policy by expanding its geographical scope of action. Another neighbour Belarus, constructing the Astravyets nuclear power plant, also poses a significant threat to our entire region. Joint reaction of the Baltic States to shared problems and threats is crucial. It is equally important to exploit the potential for generating economic growth and prosperity in the region. Proper focus on the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project, intensive cooperation towards a single gas market and the synchronisation of the power systems with the continental European power grid are the areas where intensive dialogue and collaboration is needed.

In a wider European context, especially bearing in mind the current political and security situation, the EU and its Member States have to sustain the focus on the Eastern Partnership policy and support the rapprochement of Eastern Partnership countries, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, with the EU. Due to the current problems faced by the EU and Russia's aggressive actions in Eastern

Ukraine and Syria, the EU's political involvement with Eastern Partnership countries, despite public declarations, *de facto* tends to decrease. Ambitious political objectives are avoided and focus is primarily made on practical cooperation and support for specific projects in Eastern Partnership countries, such as democratic reform, economic development, and ensuring domestic security, among others. In the context of the current political and security situation in Europe, in order to demonstrate international solidity and reliability of the European Union, as well as the importance of the Eastern Partnership policy for the EU, the coming fifth Eastern Partnership Summit has to become a success story and draw more ambitious guidelines for cooperation between the EU and Eastern Partnership countries.

I congratulate the Baltic Assembly on its important 25th anniversary. May we appreciate its accomplishments and witness many more significant achievements in the future. May we all together with our friends from the Nordic Council, the GUAM PA, the Benelux Parliament and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference enjoy mutual understanding, trust, good will, honesty and deep wisdom enabling us to continue our successful endeavours towards peace, stability, cooperation and mutually beneficial solutions.

I invite you to individually and jointly seek new ways, new solutions and new opportunities to enhance the cooperation among the Baltic States. Without the Baltic Assembly, the cooperation of the Baltic States would be hardly imaginable.

Award ceremony of the Medals of the Baltic Assembly

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** opened the ceremony of the Medals of the Baltic Assembly. Close cooperation between the Baltic States clearly indicate how important is to hold a parliamentary ties. With awarding of the Medals of the Baltic Assembly, we will celebrate the work of those who in their daily work have proved that they strongly believe in the idea of the Baltic cooperation.

The Medal of the Baltic Assembly is a symbol that celebrates laureate's dedication and contribution. Therefore, please accept the symbol of our recognition that proves that the Baltic Assembly truly appreciates your work.

Medals of the Baltic Assembly were awarded to:

- Speaker of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, **H.E. Ināra Mūrniece** for upholding the unity and cooperation of the Baltic States and for greatly contributing for the Latvian delegation to the Baltic Assembly;
- President of the Benelux Parliament in 2013 – 2014, **Marcel Oberweis** for promoting cooperation between the Baltic and Benelux countries;
- Chair of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee of the Baltic Assembly, **Veiko Spolītis** for upholding the unity and cooperation of the Baltic States;
- Archbishop Emeritus, **Andres Pöder** for promoting cooperation of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian evangelical churches;
- Association of Estonian Cities, Deputy Director for international relations **Toivo Riima** for promoting cooperation between the Baltic and the Nordic countries;
- Head of the Swedish delegation to the Nordic Council, former Vice President and President of the Nordic Council, **Hans Ingmar Wallmark** for promoting cooperation between the Baltic and the Nordic countries;
- Member of the Lithuanian delegation to the Baltic Assembly, **Jolita Vaickienė** for upholding the unity and cooperation of the Baltic States;
- Member of the Lithuanian delegation to the Baltic Assembly, **Linas Balsys** for upholding the unity and cooperation of the Baltic States;
- Member of the Lithuanian delegation to the Baltic Assembly, **Raimundas Paliukas** for upholding the unity and cooperation of the Baltic States.

22nd Baltic Council

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** opened the 22nd Baltic Council and underlined the importance of collaboration of the Baltic Council. During the Latvian Presidency of the Baltic Assembly, cooperation between the Baltic Assembly and Baltic Council was implemented in the following priority areas: 1) strengthening of the

regional security, 2) promotion of strategic communication, 3) development of transport and energy infrastructure. Today, we will listen to reports from ministers about what has been achieved during the Latvian Presidency and what is planned during the Estonian Presidency next year.

During the Latvian Presidency, there have been both successful stories and the opposite ones. The Baltic cooperation does not always run smoothly. However, the practical achievements are sometimes not highlighted enough. Among the positive examples was the coordination in regard to border guards. It is especially important in the context of migration and refugee crisis. The work on strengthening the European values in the information space and strategic communication area was started. Discussions were held regarding hybrid threats and strategic plans of the NATO and the EU. Together with representatives from the Ministries of Education and Science of the Baltic States, strengthening of cooperation in research was maintained. Special focus was put on Baltic Bonus Programme for the Baltic scientists. Trilateral contract on mutual recognition of diplomas was supported and joint marketing for higher education was held. The work was continued to support Eastern Partnership countries and work towards elimination of obstacles in combating shadow economy and VAT fraud was made.

However, cooperation of the Baltic States have not always been successful. Issues regarding the *Rail Baltic/ Rail Baltic* project was largely criticized in public. The Baltic Assembly continues to remind public about the importance of this project and will continue to oversee the development of the project. It is very important to have honest communication process between the three Baltic countries. The *Rail Baltic/ Rail Baltic* project cannot be put at risk due to short-term interests, because this is a long-term project.

The Baltic States have achieved a lot in medical products and have concluded contracts that have led to saving of life's in border area between Latvia and Estonia. Nevertheless, for unclear reasons agreement between Latvia and Lithuania still is not signed. The Baltic Assembly will continue to work on this issue to ensure that this agreement is signed in 2017. Based on declarations that have been concluded exchange of donor organs is taking place among the Baltic States. Negotiations are being continued about

joint procurements of medicines. However, the progress is not as rapid as it has been expected.

There are also issues about which the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers do not share similar opinion. Nevertheless, the Baltic Assembly will continue to raise such issues as: 1) joint military procurements; 2) joint master's program for law informant employees using both local and the EU funds; 3) will continue to put pressure regarding attraction of foreign investments and exports to the global market; 4) will continue to establish closer cooperation in the health care sector; 5) will continue discussion on new transport and infrastructure projects in framework of short-term and long-term goals; 6) closer cooperation in air traffic organisation.

Chair the Baltic Council of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia **H.E. Edgars Rinkēvičs** underlined that the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM) should have dynamic discussions about what has been achieved during the Latvian Presidency in the BCM and what should be done in future. The past 25 years have been very successful in developing the Baltic cooperation in various sectors and parliamentary cooperation as well as towards the joint road to the EU and NATO. During the Latvian Presidency in the BCM, three priorities were set. A lot of work has been done to strengthen security, strategic communication, energy and transport.

In regard to security, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ministries of Defence of the Baltic States have ensured that decisions taken in the NATO Summit in Warsaw are in line with our goals. Nevertheless, the work needs to be continued. The Baltic States need to continue explaining to partners, allies and society that we need to do a lot in order to implement decisions taken in Warsaw Summit properly. This work includes issues concerning infrastructure, domestic systems, financing and contracts regarding the status of military personnel and allied military personnel. Many of these issues will not be in media, however that will not decrease their importance.

Another important issue is the external border of the EU and how to strengthen the border of the Baltic States in the context of migration. Therefore, it is very important that the Baltic States were able to quickly agree on the joint task force for borders and

coastal guard. In the context of next multiannual budget of the EU, the Baltic States need to work intense to receive funding and increase cooperation with other EU Member States.

The Baltic States have nearly 25 years' experience in successful cooperation in defence, but 20 years ago, the issue of military procurements was raised, it was raised also 10 years ago and it is still topical today. Unfortunately, nothing has been achieved. Due to specific interests of each State, the Baltic State were not able to agree on cooperation. For the fortune of the Baltic States, this issue has recently become topical in the EU. The EU is discussing creation and development of joint military strategy and procurements.

The next common priority is strategic communication. It has been discussed for years, but considering the aggressive policy by Russia, it has become even more important. Russia has been able to successfully manipulate with information turning “black in white” and vice versa. Cooperation in strategic communication has progressed. The Baltic Centre for Media Excellence has played an important role in this process. However, one thing is the academic understanding of the problem and another is the reality that is seen on daily basis. Governments every day need to be ready to fight against provocative information and lies that are floated in the media. It is important that society is being informed about the real situation, achievements and future vision. Cooperation of the Baltic States in transport and infrastructure as well as energy network interconnections are good. In regard to the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project the hardest part is still ahead.

The Baltic States are often referred as three sisters and as in every family sisters often fight. However, the family disagreements need to be kept within the family.

In regard to future cooperation, this year has not brought pleasant news. The decision by the United Kingdom (UK) about leaving the EU has a direct impact on the Baltic States. The UK has always been an ally in economic issues and foreign policy. Therefore, it is in the interests of the Baltic States to participate and closely follow development of this issue and ensure the best possible solutions, which is continuation of close cooperation between the UK and the EU. Status of citizens of the Baltic States

living in the UK is important. The year 2017, will be a critical year considering the future of the EU.

Latvia as the coordinator of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation format has worked intense. Nevertheless, the work in such sectors as economic, culture, etc., needs to be continued to defend our interests. We will need to compensate the “loss” of the UK in the EU. The EU is a cooperation of independent States rather than a federation. The priority should be on security of the citizens against terrorism.

In conclusion, it needs to be underlined that events taking place on the borders and inside of the EU have pushed backwards such issue as the Eastern Partnership policy of the EU. However, through joint action, targeted strategy and help of the Estonian Presidency in the Council of Europe it is possible to continue work on this policy. The next Eastern Partnership Summit will take place in Estonia. Perhaps, the Baltic States should set aside plans that are more ambitious for a while and concentrate on fulfilment of promises such as visa liberalisation for Ukraine and Georgia, as well as Association Agreement. The Association Agreement with Ukraine is currently under threat due to referendum in the Netherlands. Therefore, the Baltic States should continue efforts and continue to support friends and neighbours.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **H.E. Jürgen Ligi** noted that this year the Baltic States celebrate the 25th anniversary of the restoration of independence. This year also marks the 25th anniversary of the establishing of the Baltic Assembly. In human life, the first 25 years is the time for growing up.

For a quarter of a century, we have been able to make our choices and take our steps as independent states. Our cooperation, both between ourselves and at the international level, is very extensive, and I am sure that by today, we have also overcome the problems of growing up. The Baltic States are perceive together internationally and together are strong.

Through decades, the Baltic and Nordic cooperation has been close, and it has brought the Baltic region as a whole on the map of Europe and the world in economic, cultural and political sense. Unfortunately, also in terms of security policy.

For Estonia, the Nordic and Baltic region is a home market. Latvia and Lithuania together with Finland, Sweden and Norway are among our first dozen trade partners. In Estonia, 60 % of foreign investments come from the Nordic and Baltic countries. Last year, the Nordic and Baltic countries accounted for 58% of Estonia's export and 44% of import. Neighbouring countries are also our main partners in the field of tourism – 63% of the tourists in Estonia came from the Nordic and Baltic countries in 2015. The popularity of Latvia and Lithuania as travel destinations is growing among the Estonians.

Although our political and economic relations are close, there is still room for development in the Baltic cooperation, especially in the field of energy, transport and information technology. Joint development of those spheres will contribute to the economic progress of our countries and strengthen common security.

I thank Latvia for being the host of today's joint meeting and leading the Baltic cooperation this year. You have done great work.

The objectives of Latvia's presidency have had a long perspective and are positive in every way. Therefore, Estonia will continue developing of regional security and transport and energy infrastructure during its Presidency of the Baltic Assembly in 2017.

The first is security. In strengthening the security of the region and improving security and defence cooperation, we want to support and coordinate rapid and effective implementation of the NATO Warsaw Summit's decisions regarding the Baltic region, where the main focus is on the increased presence of the allies. Estonia also want to promote coordination of military capability development. We consider it necessary to continue cooperation in the management of the EU external border, and we also wish to discuss how to effectively implement the EU Global Strategy.

The second great priority is preparation for synchronising the Baltic power networks with the European power networks.

Estonia's third priority is developing of transport connections. We work with the Connecting Europe Facility to implement the *Rail Baltic/ Rail Baltica* project. In order to make the construction of *Rail Baltic/ Rail Baltica* project as profitable as possible, we would like to closely involve Finland and Poland in the project.

Besides coordinating the Baltic cooperation, Estonia will also hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2017. Unlike Latvia and Lithuania, Estonia does not yet have the experience of presidency, but we are grateful that you have shared your experience with us, and we rely on the unity and effective cooperation of the Baltic States also during the presidency.

This presidency, too, will give us a possibility to deal with the issues that are important to us in the context of Baltic cooperation. Like the Single Market, digital market, e-solutions and development of information society in different spheres of the EU policies, and also the Energy Union and stronger integration of Eastern partners with Europe. All of them have an impact that strengthens the welfare and security of our region.

It is natural that our most important and extensive cooperation in these issues is with our closest neighbours. Although large part of our cooperation takes place within the framework of the European Union, the Baltic cooperation will always be special. Estonia will do all it can to make this cooperation smooth and effective.

And finally, please allow me to stress the significance of cooperation in culture and education, and the importance of increasing mutual contacts between our people. I believe that the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the independence of our countries in 2018 will provide lots of excellent opportunities for that.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **H.E. Linas Linkevičius** informed that several years ago, he was a member of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly. Since, then much has changed. Nevertheless, the main aim has remained. The Baltic Assembly still is the most important platform for discussing issues important for the Baltic States. The Baltic Assembly raises the issues important for the Baltic

States at regional and international level. The Baltic States do not face problems, the Baltic States face challenges.

In our continent, we can see different challenges and tests - migration, Brexit, Russians aggression against Ukraine, killings in Syria – are only some of them. These challenges are threats to global security and are closely related to the national interests of the Baltic States.

Therefore, it is very important to remember the things that unite us and make us stronger. Democratic institutions have a major role. Several days ago, during the visit in Hague, Dutch political party leaders informed that the government could not proceed with ratification of the deal, which the other 27 EU countries have already approved due to negative result of Dutch referendum vote against an EU-Ukraine agreement. It is a paradox and it means that the Baltic States also need to work to reduce the possible gap between the government institutions and people and the EU and people. People not only need to understand what parliamentarians do, but also need to support them. The Baltic States need to avoid situations similar to the one in the Netherlands. When minority dictates the majority and State becomes a captive of its people. People need to be respected and informed.

The resilience in the EU and in the NATO is critical. In future, the Baltic States will be forces to cooperate and focus on national security. The Baltic States have to achieve smooth implementation of the NATO Warsaw Summit decisions, because security of the entire continent depends on that. The Baltic States need to cooperate in the areas that are related to hybrid threats, coordinate tools, methods, attitudes, attempts to fight against propaganda and cyber-attacks against energy and critical infrastructures.

Many more tendencies need to be addressed. Recently, during the celebrations of 25th anniversary of the restoring diplomatic relations between Lithuania and Sweden, both members of parliament and journalists raised very crucial issues regarding the North Stream 2 and the NATO. It was discussed whether the company responsible for building the North Stream 2 is not in conflict with national priorities of Lithuania regarding the cooperation in the EU and the NATO. During these discussions, it was underlined that there is a possibility that in near future the Baltic States will lose the

UK, which currently is an ally. Therefore, it is our task to ensure that the UK do not distance itself. The UK is exiting from the EU, but not from the Europe and European security system and the NATO. This is an example, where the Baltic voice could be very important in discussions. The Baltic States need to advocate for the UK to remain active in addressing security issues. It is important that the UK continue being in favour about the Euro-Atlantic unity, because it will predetermine security situation and economic stability in the United States of America (USA) and Europe. Free Trade Agreement between the EU and the USA is at the very first stage. People need to be informed about it and understand what advantages or disadvantages it might bring. The Baltic States support for the Free Trade Agreement might come at holt.

Another important thing is to think in advance about the future of decision-making procedure, so that the Baltic States do not hinder it selves in terms of economic collaboration.

In terms of energy, H.E. Jürgen Ligi underlined such area as synchronisation of power systems, which will need joint support. The Baltic States will need a financing assistance from the EU, therefore governments and parliaments of the Baltic States will need to continue joint efforts. Energy is like a blood system, than within the body can be independent system but if the system is dependent on something the situation changes. The Baltic States have experience the situation where they are dependant in energy sector, fortunately, this has changed. Lithuania is proud to have the LNG terminal and will have other links to similar energy system.

The problem of nuclear terminals have no borders, although geographically it is more close to Lithuania. Owners of nuclear terminals need to abide international standards and safety requirements. Therefore, Lithuania asks for understanding and support from Estonia and Latvia. Construction of multi-reactor nuclear power plant project in the Astravets, which is in violation of many international standards and principles. This is one of the topics, which relates not only national but also regional and European problems. Therefore, the voice of members of parliaments should be clear.

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** informed that in the end of August 2016, the Baltic Council of Ministers submitted written answers to the questions posed

by the Baltic Assembly. However, some of the questions that have been posed were not sufficiently answered. Therefore, parliamentarians will use the possibility and address some issues during the time allocated for discussions.

Discussion

Member of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee of the Baltic Assembly **Kārlis Krēslīņš** noted that the 21st century is an interesting period of time. People often say that this is a flowing period where people, goods and services are flowing where it is the best. EU politicians do not change their messages.

The State tries to ensure equal level of welfare for every family. In Latvia, there is Riga where the level of welfare is higher, but in cities such as Daugavpils situation is not so bright. In the EU, the average level of welfare is higher. The EU funds help implement various programs and measures through put the EU to reduce the inequality between the regions. However, States not always succeed.

In regard to migrants, there are migrants seeking for better life and work conditions. Nevertheless, this is the decision of each country on its own whether to accept migrants or not.

According to the UN Regulations, there are no occupied territories. As long as there are no occupied territories in a country, the migrants should remain in their own countries. As regards to civil upheaval, it needs to be combated by internal task forces. Historical examples are the moving of the monument in Estonia or the January uprising in Riga. It is difficult to deal with political changes, therefore there is a need to eliminate the political actor with indirect influence from outside forces. It needs to be understood that people leaving their country with no apparent reason are emigrants, not refugees. It is not possible to ensure equal level of security around the world. Therefore, the only thing to do is to try to decrease the threat to the life's of people. This should be one of the main goals of the UN. Countries should agree on such procedures and measures to ensure that the NATO could perform on behalf of the UN to ensure peace around the world.

He asked about the opinion of the Ministers of the Baltic States regarding refuge and migration crisis.

Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Ādamsons** noted that in mid-90's joint understanding about security and defence was more in line than it is today. The Baltic States established the Baltic Battalion, which had joint objective. Today, during the Committees meeting it was discussed that it is time to return to idea of establishing the Baltic Brigade.

In regard to joint procurements, in 2013 within the framework of the meeting of the Baltic Assembly it was agreed to initiate a joint procurement for armed vehicles. Parliamentarians and ministers from Estonia and Lithuania agreed, unfortunately H.E. Edgars Rinkēvičs banded this procurement. In the end Latvia bought used armed vehicles.

There is a need for global understanding of a term "terrorist", because the situation where one person is recognised as a terrorist in one country, but is not recognised in another should be avoided.

The Baltic Assembly adopted in its 32nd Resolution to establish a joint cybercrime combating centre in Riga. This should not be confused with cyber security centre. He asked when and whether such joint cybercrime combating centre will be established in the Baltic States. He informed that during the 34th Session of the Baltic Assembly, he asked whether there is a research why people from the Baltic States join radical movements from another countries, such as Islamic State.

Chair of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee of the Baltic Assembly **Atis Lejiņš** asked about the North Stream 2 project development in the Baltic States. He asked about the position of the Baltic States in regard to war in Syria and its development.

Chair the Baltic Council of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia **H.E. Edgars Rinkēvičs** informed that in regard to question by Kārlis Krēsliņš about the issue of migrants and refugees is clearly defined in international law and in

domestic law. The terms “refugee” and “migrant” are separate. There is also specific procedure to follow in order to grant the status of refugee. People receive asylum only if they comply with specific criteria’s according to procedure. Last year, Europe experienced a wave of migration where people intentionally lost their passports or actually lost passports. Thus people that were not eligible for asylum, tried to prove that they come from Syria or other conflict zones. Therefore, it was difficult to separate people and understand who does qualify for asylum and who does not.

Another issue was to understand what to do with those people who do not qualify for asylum in the EU. Because, other countries also refused to receive these persons. Recently, the situation is improving due to decisions taken within the EU by the Foreign Affairs Council and Defence Council. Nevertheless, there is still a room for further improvement. The Baltic States have quite efficient system to deal with these issues. The Baltic States have taken active part and have sent experts to Greece and Italy to assist their governments to deal with migrants.

In regard to question by Jānis Ādamsons about increasing number of citizens of the Baltic States who join radical Islam movements, data received by security agencies is still being analysed. According to received information about Latvian citizens identified as participants in radical Islam movements, it is difficult to classify it as a new trend. These persons are mostly youth, who have not been able to find their place in society and who through social networks have come into contact with “head hunters” from other European countries. Unfortunately, this has been connected with some negative situation at home that has played its role in decision-making process.

Nevertheless, there is not data that would indicate the situation as a wide spread trend of Latvian citizens converting to Islam. Colleagues working with social integration should analyse these issues.

In regard to cyber-crime combating centre, this issue has been discussed by competent authorities. The main issue, which is currently discussed relates to the effectiveness of establishing such centre and whether the responsibilities wouldn’t overlap with competence of Interpol and the EC3 and whether such cooperation would give added value to the law enforcement agencies of the Baltic States. It is expected that soon a

decision by responsible experts regarding establishment of cyber-crime combating centre will be made and experts will be able to report on the issue to the Baltic Assembly.

H.E. Linas Linkevičius already outlined the position of the Baltic Council of Ministers in regard to Nord Stream 2 that any decision about energy systems need to be taken in accordance with general position of the EU.

Situation regarding Syria has been in depth discussed during recent meetings in the EU. Members of the EU have not taken the “back seat”. Although, the Members of the EU are unanimous in defining the situation, there are still discussions about how strong the position should be taken. Western media has reported wrongly that the EU is not continuing sanctions against Russia, which is not true. This issue was simply not in the agenda of the meeting by the Council of Europe. Discussion about how active the EU involvement should be in the resolution of the situation will be continued. Obviously, the EU must take a strong position on this, however several Member States wish that the EU would take a different position. Without no doubts, the position of Latvia is that the EU should take even more active involvement.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **H.E. Jürgen Ligi** noted that the refugee crisis is the most serious crisis in Europe and it must be handled with full energy. The Europe did not understand it a year ago and therefore changed its policy. Estonia will work to fulfil its obligations and according to plan has received 16 refugees. Refugees have been provided with social guarantees and appropriate life conditions. Currently, refugees are living in Estonia. They are not leaving Estonia, but, hopefully, one day they will leave to return to their home countries. Europe needs to deal with causes of migration and has to strengthen its borders. The critical issue is agreement with Turkey.

Estonia has specialised on cyber-crimes and has the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. Estonia is fully aware about the seriousness of cyber danger. Cyber-crimes can cause the same damage as conventional war. The persons behind last cyber-attack on USA still are unidentified, but the damage caused created economic destabilisation.

Events in regard to radical Islam movements remind that internal security issues are as much important as external security issues. Nevertheless, each country need to discuss the possible causes for such radicalisation and keeping Islam moderate.

In regard to situation in Syria, decisions need to be more decisive and Russia need to be included in all conclusions. Additional difficulty is the problem with delivering humanitarian aid for those in need. Schools, hospitals and event humanitarian aid vehicles have been bombed.

The Nord Stream 2 is a geopolitical project for Estonia that does not have economic explanation. This is another possibility for Russian domination in energy market and making Europe dependant on one source of energy. It is not in accordance with European Energy Union and accepted Energy Policy. The Baltic States have done a lot to diminish dependency on Russia's energy market and geopolitical ambitions.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **H.E. Linas Linkevičius** underlined that the Baltic States have not experience any migration flows. However, the Baltic States cannot be neutral and stay aside when other EU neighbours need to deal with this issue. The Baltic States need to show solidarity. There are different problems and different sensitivities, but if the Baltic States will not show solidarity to other Member States, they will not receive it in other issues either. The Baltic States need to distinguish between refugees and economic migrants. It has not been done yet. The messages were not clear and were not understood. Recently, during a working visit to the centre for refugees people revealed they stories about political situation in their home country. These stories were difficult. People shared their perspectives and informed that their aim is to learn German language and later move to Germany. This is the reality. Nevertheless, the Baltic States need to implement their obligations and at least fulfil minimum of requirements. The number of people that will be accepted to the Baltic States is the very minimum and will not create dramatic demographic changes. The most important thing is to show solidarity.

In regard to Nord Stream 2, it is not a commercial project and is not created by economic reasons. The capacity of the Nord Stream 1 is not even fully used. This project also does not have nothing common with diversification of energy. This project will increase

dependency on one single energy source. It has nothing common with Energy Union principles. Moreover, it is almost impossible to stop this project. Therefore, it is important that parliamentarians of the Baltic States share the same position and willingness to comply with the EU policy and rules. It could be possible to apply some rules such as the rules for third countries that could be applicable to this project. It is expected that not everyone will be satisfied, but it is not the task of the Baltic States to please someone. The Baltic States need to show their position.

In regard to cyber-crime combating centre, experts should present their advice. However, it is more efficient to use the existing capacities and not accumulate next centres. National capabilities need to be improved. It is not practical to establish different centres, which are all working with similar issues.

The common position of the Baltic States is important also in regard to situation in Syria. The Baltic States are not engaged in this situation, but some players in Syria are engaged in the Baltic region. It is not possible that Russia make military incursions in Ukraine and creates peace elsewhere. Unfortunately, some countries are were not convinced about the performance of Russia in Ukraine but they opened their eyes due to Russia's performance in Syria. The EU could position itself better. During last meetings in the EU, countries only discussed the issue and expressed their concerns. Currently, credibility of all the international community is undermined including the EU and the NATO. For that reason, the voice of parliamentarians is very important. The Baltic States need to be consistent. Although, no one favours the sanctions, they should not be lifted.

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** informed that the Baltic Assembly together with the Baltic Council of Ministers have elaborated on the 22nd Baltic Council Joint Statement and closed the session.

Joint Statement of the 22nd Baltic Council was signed.

Addresses by foreign delegations and guests

Chair of the Swedish delegation to the Nordic Council **Hans Wallmark** noted that after one month Presidiums of the Baltic and Nordic countries will meet in the Nordic Council's Annual Summit in Iceland. This year, the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council will celebrate 25 years of cooperation.

The Baltic and Nordic countries share one sea, common history and common values. Economies are strongly interconnected. The Baltic and Nordic countries share also the same security challenges.

During last years, in the Nordic Council intense discussions were held on such issues as defence and security policy. During Cold War, it was almost like taboo, but today it is on the top of the agenda of the Nordic Council. In the centre of these discussions is the security challenges that are shared with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

As sisters and brothers we can join and celebrate that the Baltic States 25 years ago regained their freedom and independence. Iceland is proud for being the first, which recognized the Republic of Lithuania. Sweden was the first to re-establish an embassy in Vilnius. The Baltic and Nordic countries together is Baltic-Nordic entity of wealth, openness and democracy.

The illegal annexation of Crimea, clashes in the Eastern part of the Ukraine that have caused a death of ten thousand people and twenty thousand were wounded. The deployment of missiles, high frequency military number of incidents in the neighbourhood all of that shows that international society face new security challenges. The situation has changed to the worse. The Baltic and Nordic countries follow the same course even if the countries take different approach in regard to membership in the EU and the NATO. Nevertheless, the work is coordinated. Inside the EU it is important to show unity and agree upon common cause. That means continuing with sanctions against Russia after illegal annexation of Crimea, it means support for democratic forces in Ukraine and it means better and deeper cooperation together with the NATO that after the Warsaw Summit even more stresses the issue of common security. It also means more military drills together in the Baltic Sea region.

Some weeks ago, the Nordic Council of Ministers arranged an interesting seminar about Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO). The NORDEFECO structure includes political and military cooperation levels and is open also for the Baltic friends. Researcher of seminar proposed to discuss security and open it for enlarged cooperation with the Baltic States. It is logical to listen to such proposals. The Baltic Centres of Excellence shows the today's and future challenges. In Tallinn is located the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence that is very relevant after cyber-attacks just week ago. In Riga is situated the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence that introduce the Nordic countries with new forms of danger. In Vilnius is located the NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence which raised new discussions about the North Stream 2 and introduced with new challenges that could also be seen in a form of energy.

The Baltic and Nordic countries share friendly ties, common history and common values as well as future challenges. It gives strengths.

Member of the German Bundestag, Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE PA) **Jürgen Klimke** presented a supplementary item of report about the Baltic Sea cooperation adopted by the OSCE PA in Georgia in July 2016.

The close cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region has a great asset rooted in a common history. The Hanseatic town network across the Baltic Sea States that has secured the economic prosperity and region for centuries. Even today, the cooperation in the Baltic region is close. However, it seems to be at risk. Against this background the OSCE PA item has many significant points that need to be underlined.

These points are: 1) youth exchange; 2) conflict monitoring in the Baltic Sea Region; 3) cooperation with other entities in the Baltic Sea region.

Youth exchange in the Baltic Sea Region is very important, cross-border exchange through long-term exchange, schools, university partnerships can contribute the learning process and reduce prejudice. The contacts from youth exchanges, through new experiences and learning from other cultures, formation of networks beyond

national level are very important for better coexistence. Youth exchange is the best way to understand the other side. Youth exchange teaches not only tolerance but also acceptance. While there are numerous exchange programmes within the Nordic country, there is hardly any youth exchange in the entire Baltic Sea Region.

Increase of serious conflicts in the Baltic Sea Region has negative impact. The different movement of ships and aircrafts by different parties is evaluated differently. Therefore, proper monitoring of conflicts in the Baltic Sea Region would ensure more rapid and efficient response to specific security events. Genuinely, there is more than ever the need to create conversation formats, implement and monitor armistice and establish confidence-building measures. It would be useful to set a multilateral monitoring agency of the Baltic Sea Region.

The OSCE PA promotes the coexistence, because regional issues can only be discussed with involvement of all stakeholders. For this reason, the OSCE PA with mentioned supplementary item encourage States around the Baltic Sea to take closer look on decisions of the Baltic Sea Parliament and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. The Baltic Sea Council meetings should take place at ministerial level. Furthermore, the OSCE PA supports the Resolution of the 24th BSPPC and joint management of the refugee crisis. Adoption of Resolutions is an important step and national parliaments and governments are required to implement them.

Positive feedbacks have been received from Poland and Sweden, which are willing to implement important aspects of supplementary item at national level. Support of the Baltic States on the supplementary item would be much appreciated by the OSCE PA.

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** informed that in 2016, Latvia simultaneously held a Presidency in the Baltic Assembly and in the BSPPC.

Current Chair of the BSPPC Carola Veit have addressed the Session of the Baltic Assembly by the following words.

President of the Baltic Assembly Jānis Vucāns presented address by Chair of the BSPPC Carola Veit.

The cooperation between the Baltic Assembly and the BSPC has been and still is a true success story. Our partnership has always been a very close and efficient one. This was apparent, when the 25th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference held its celebrations two months ago in Riga under the Presidency of Latvia. The simultaneous presidency guaranteed that the topics of mutual interest found their way to our agendas.

The Baltic Assembly and the BSPC benefit from a very close cooperation between parliamentarians, supported by the organisations' secretariats. This includes that members of the Baltic Assembly are at the same time members of the Standing Committee of the BSPC and are very intensely involved in the work of the BSPC Working Groups.

The most prominent example is the President of the Republic of Latvia, who was very much involved in the work of the BSPC and who was also Chair of one of the BSPC Working Groups.

Mutual understanding, support and help, trust, and in some cases also friendship are the fundament of our cooperation. Apart from the acting people, essential message is that very often we have the same goals and the same objectives. The Baltic Assembly and the BSPC work on identical or similar topics, we have similar priorities.

This applies not only to the work programme under the Latvian Presidency, where we focused on high quality education and labour. This applies also, inter alia, to environmental affairs, to maritime issues, to energy, to social and health care and to human trafficking.

The Baltic Assembly and its parliamentarians are very active players in the BSPC, who intensely support national governments providing detailed feedback about the implementation of the BSPC's calls for action. Nevertheless, the Baltic Assembly and the BSPC have not only common goals and objectives, but also have the same vision.

Vision to have a peaceful and free Baltic Sea Area. This was main vision in 1991, when the Baltic Assembly and the BSPC began common parliamentary work. And this is not less important in these days.

It is more important than ever to follow our guidelines, to follow our principal basis, which is dialogue to get over critical and tense situations: BSPC wants to be a platform for cooperation, for commitment and for competence in political dialogue of parliaments, governments and civil society in the Baltic Sea Region. And we have maintained this political dialogue in difficult times at our meetings and conferences.

Let's try to keep on with our dialogue. Let's try to find peaceful solutions.

The BSPC want to have a prosperous development of the whole Baltic Sea Region, and want to ensure equal living conditions. Let's go on working on their realisation during the next 25 years, in close cooperation, with all our energy, with all our commitment, with all our competence.

Continuation of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly

Session 1

Migration and EU external borders management: New challenges and joint solutions for the Baltic States

Vice President of the Baltic Assembly **Helir-Valdor Seeder** opened the first thematic session about migration and EU external borders management. During this session challenges and joint solutions for the Baltic States regarding migration, closer cooperation of border guard services and protection of borders will be discussed.

This year, these issues were on the agenda of the Legal Affairs and Security and Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly. He extended his appreciation to members of the relevant committees for their active contribution for fostering coordination of activities of the Baltic States in this field. Members of the committees have submitted also recommendations for the Resolution regarding the issues, which will be discussed under this thematic session. All participants have available draft Resolution of the Baltic Assembly with relevant recommendations.

The main conclusions by the Committees of the Baltic Assembly regarding the topic, which is going to be discussed, are the following. First, the Baltic Assembly appreciates

the ongoing active cooperation among border guard authorities. There is regular exchange of information in combatting illegal migration and cross border crime. *(There are Latvian – Lithuanian and Latvian – Estonian contact points for effective information exchange and information check).*

Second, during meetings of the committees, Baltic governmental representatives and experts from the European institutions have clearly indicated that much closer cooperation regarding migration, protection of borders and cooperation of border guard authorities is needed; there is a need to transfer know-how from one country to another how to deal with new challenges of migration.

Third, during meetings of the committees of the Baltic Assembly, parliamentarians have highly estimate European Joint Masters' programme in Strategic Border Management; this programme was initiated by European Agency Frontex in collaboration with several European Universities and Academies as a response to increasing challenges to European border security and management of migration flows. Parliamentarians of the Baltic States are proud that Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, Rēzekne Higher Education Institution and Mykolas Romeris University are among consortium partners of this project.

Minister of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Tomas Žilinskas** quoted the famous USA car producer Henry Ford who once said: “Don't look at the mistakes, find solutions.” Looking at the umbrella message of this conference, this quote is both sympathetic and challenging. Everyone can agree that the ongoing migration crisis is one of the most difficult challenges that the world – and in concrete the EU - has been facing for the last few years. This extreme situation has rallied all European countries to quickly develop and agree numerous common measures and reforms in order to manage migration flows.

Although the numbers of irregular migrants have declined to some extent this year compared to 2015, situation remains difficult with thousands of migrants still arriving at the Southern and South-Eastern borders of the EU every week, risking a deadly journey through the Mediterranean Sea, organised by dastardly organised crime gangs.

It is obvious that with the ongoing protracted armed conflicts, instability, poverty and deprivation in many of EU's neighbouring regions and countries the issue of migration will remain as the main issue on the European agenda for the following years.

Knowing this, our key task is to tackle the root causes and be prepared to manage migration flows effectively. Supporting development of third countries, providing aid and cooperating with them is of key importance, but at the same time, we also have to develop an effective EU return policy.

The EU-Turkey agreement that was signed this spring has been effective in limiting irregular migration to Greece and ensuring safe and legal ways for people in need of protection to enter EU. However, such measures are fragile and dependant on too many external factors that the EU cannot fully control. Therefore, building our own resilience and capability to react quick and to control such crises must be a clear goal if we want to find a reliable long-term solution. Otherwise, the same situations could repeat over and over again.

The Baltic States are that safe as safe are our EU external borders are. Here we – the Baltic States - have a strong role to play. The protection of EU external borders for all of us is not an option, but a clear responsibility.

Lithuania is responsible for protection of 1763 km borders and 61% of it is the EU external border (1070 km) with Belarus and Russia. Together with Estonia and Latvia we are all responsible for more than 1800 km of EU external border.

At the EU level, the Baltic States already took concrete steps towards establishing an effective Security Union. For example, the European Border and Coast Guard, the Entry-Exit System and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System will help secure Europe's borders, while strengthening EUROPOL's role in the effective sharing of information and combatting document fraud.

The Baltic States should continue to contribute share of experts and technical equipment to the reserve pools of the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency and to continue to support Member States that are currently under highest migration

pressure. This is an imperative if we expect the same support in case of similar situation at our borders.

At the national and regional level, the Baltic States also need to act. Until now, the situation at external borders of the Baltic States has remained stable during this migration crisis with no significant changes. However, the Baltic States have to be prepared for any changes as the migration routes can shift very rapidly. It has been already witnessed last year, when after closing the migrant route through Western Balkans, a new “Arctic” route opened with hundreds of migrants arriving through Russia to the northern borders of our Scandinavian neighbours Finland and Norway.

With a long continuous stretch of eastern EU external border that the Baltic States have with Russia and Belarus, the Baltic Region is exposed to similar threats too. Also, instability in some of the Eastern Neighbourhood countries poses a possible risk of new routes through or to our region. Therefore, the Baltic States should be committed to enhance cooperation at both strategic and operational level and be prepared to coordinate actions and support each other in cases of such extraordinary situations at borders.

A complex of measures have to be taken and implemented. Therefore, several areas need to be highlighted. Firstly, modernisation of border surveillance systems and quick integration of new technologies. Effective border surveillance is a vital part of successful border management. With limited human resources for patrolling the borders, it is essential to employ new technologies that allow remote monitoring of the borders 24/7. This enables early warning and allows border guards of the Baltic States to act rapidly and precisely. Currently, the Baltic States are committed to modernize their border surveillance systems. Of course, the latest technologies are expensive. However, ultimately it pays off in quality and compensates for the lack in human resources. Therefore, the Baltic States should continue this modernization process to cover all the external borders as soon as possible.

Secondly, enhanced exchange of information, risk analysis and identification of common threats. Sharing of information is of key importance to coordinate our actions in emergency situations and warn each other of possible threats. It is also important to

ensure an integral monitoring of the situation at our external borders by combining information for thorough risk analysis. Having a complete picture, allows to better identify shifts in irregular migration flows and also track the evolving activities of migrant smugglers and other criminal groups who might be trying to find and exploit gaps in our border management systems.

Thirdly, enhancing capabilities/capacity building of our law enforcement officers in order to use the instruments efficiently we need to work on capacity building for our law enforcement officers by furnishing them with the actual professional knowledge, skills and best practices needed.

Last month in Tallinn, during meeting with Ministers of Interior of Latvia and Estonia we have exchanged views on a possibility to establish a Joint Baltic training programme for law enforcement institutions. This idea was also discussed by experts, which have evaluated the existing training systems of law enforcement officers in the Baltic States and based on this, the conclusion was made that so far there is no added value of establishing a joint Master's Programme for the law enforcement personnel of the Baltic States.

Moreover, we need to use at maximum the existing training programmes implemented by the EU agencies such as CEPOL and FRONTEX together with our national educational institutions. Training must continue to be a key element of our future cooperation. For example, in case of any migration influx at borders of the Baltic States, "success" would depend on the preparedness of officers to act and to coordinate their actions in practice. To achieve this, they have to be well educated and their skills must be maintained and improved on a regular basis. The lifelong learning principal is the key. Therefore, the need to continue organising the bilateral/trilateral trainings for our law enforcement officers on a regular basis.

The security in the Baltic Region (as well as in the world) is not something given. The Baltic States need to work on it. In challenging times like these, must work together and not in isolation. Security of the Baltic States is based on a ground feeling of cooperation, based on mutual professional trust and respect. We need to integrate our capabilities and ensure synergy of our efforts. Collectively, the Baltic States are safer.

As Lao-tse once said: “Even the biggest problem in the world could have been solved, while it was still small.”

Discussion

Senator, Member of the Romanian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECF PA) **Nicolae Vlad Popa** informed that he has been a Member of the European Parliament and Rapporteur on Regulation about political asylum and illegal immigration (2009). In 2009, the illegal traffic of migrants produced a profit of USD 3 billion for criminal groups. The problem is that there are minimum 500,000,000 people in Africa and Asia willing to have a better life and are waiting for a chance to come to Europe.

The issue of refugees have become a critical problem both at national and at international level. Due to dramatically changing situation in the world, there is a need for a new approach and solution for migration. The primary concept of migration policy of a country should include protection of domestic inhabitants and organisation of decent reception and settlement of migrants. The necessary steps to set up conditions for Resolution concerning the issue of refugees include two important steps. First, to adopt measures strengthening national legislation and democratic institutions. Second, to reconsider or if necessary abolish laws or regulations that are not compatible with generally accepted principals and norms. Migration policy should include measures to actively control the flow of migrants and their socioeconomic adaptation and integration. It is important to help refugees, displaced persons and communities that are affected by the presence of these people. The current system is not able to deal with migration flows that are approaching Europe. The majority of people have serious reasons to leave their country, but among them, there are also those who take advantage of situation in order to get illegally to Europe.

Migration is a danger to the entire continent. Therefore, there is a need for a new Directive on migration. Given the circumstances, there is a need for legislative changes that would ensure that refugees receive a permanent status based on temporary situation and after serious investigation of each refugee, the final grant for full protection could be granted. Changes need to be made also in the system of asylum seekers. It would be

a logical and practical decision that person applying for asylum would first receive a temporary protection. In this way, country would not need to deal with causes of migration that are temporary.

In the Joint Statement of the Baltic Assembly, parliamentarians of the Baltic States consider to provide protection for those in need and effectively return irregular migrants. I propose the following: 1) temporary protection; 2) a permanent protection.

Minister of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Tomas Žilinskas** noted that Heads of Governments of the Baltic States have underlined that society needs to help people who are running from the war zones and not to give a status for economic migrants. It takes time to analyse all data and information in order to separate people who are economic migrants and who are refugees or persons who can be granted status of asylum seeker. For that reason, there is need for an effective return policy for irregular migrants. If persons will receive permanent status, countries need to have effective integration policy that is being coordinated with local municipalities. This integration policy needs to ensure that these persons do not violate public order and laws, but are dedicated to learning of countries traditions, language and social values. The proposal for the Joint Statement of the Baltic Assembly will be taken for note.

Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Ādamsons** expressed gratitude to Minister of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania for detailed report. He informed that Legal Affairs and Security Committee of the Baltic Assembly has closely followed the issue of migration.

It is easier to deal with problems, while they are still comparatively small. In regards to law enforcement agencies and police, the prevention of a problem is accomplished with greater sufficiency than investigation and thus costs less. Revolutions of any origin always inflict nations suffer. Civil war in Libya that is closely linked to Kaddafi and Syria could have been prevented.

The problems in Europe are connected with introduction of border free area. By introducing the border free area, countries lost their external borders. These losses are mostly felt by countries in South of Europe.

In one of interviews High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini has said that Europe needs international tools. However, Europe already has many tools, including the one on maritime traffic, which enable countries to cooperate. For that reason, it can be concluded that there is either a lack of knowledge or inability to cooperate.

Another mistake by the EU is in the asylum procedure. The optimal solution could be to grant separate or alternative status for five years to a refugee and to ensure that the person is staying in that country in which he has been granted the status.

The latest issue is about persons from Vietnam. In the conference in Vilnius, parliamentarians of the Baltic States agreed that this issue needs to be discussed within the format of the Baltic Assembly and colleagues from Belarus and Russia. Consultations with colleagues from Belarus and Russia would switch the level of discussion accelerating the admission process of Vietnamese to the territory of Russia. The Baltic States add particular attention to border security and security of external borders. In 2016, statistic data about illegal migration was not high. On the border, 120 illegal migrants have been arrested and most of them were Vietnamese. For that reason, close cooperation need to be maintained with law enforcement agencies of Russia and Belarus.

Chair of the Education, Science and Culture Committee, Chair of the Budget and Audit Committee of the Baltic Assembly **Juris Viļums** asked to elaborate and provide arguments on the conclusion by the Ministries of the Baltic States not to establish Joint Baltic master's programme for law enforcement agencies. This issue is on the agenda of the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly and is included in the current version of the Resolution of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly.

Minister of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Tomas Žilinskas** informed that during the meeting of the Ministers of the Baltic States it was decided to gather experts and share thought and information about relevance of such joint master's programme. It was concluded that the current possibilities of the existing training programmes by the European agencies such as CEPOL and FRONTEX are not fully exploited. Instead of

creating something new and introducing joint programme, there is a need to fully use the existing possibilities at the EU and national level.

There are some differences between the Baltic States. Estonia and Lithuania already have such master's programme. However, there is no need to have joint master's programme. A good solution would be to maintain practical cooperation and joint trainings. This would help agencies in the Baltic States to understand each other better. It is also possible to revise this issue more in depth.

Former member of the Estonian delegation to the Baltic Assembly **Trivimi Velliste** asked about integration process of refugees in Lithuania. Integration of persons can be easily managed if the number of persons is limited up to comparatively small numbers. However, what if the number of persons is growing in years to come, for example 5,000 or 10,000 refugees in Lithuania for the following years. Moreover, they could create critical mass and stronger sense of autonomy in Lithuania and potentially they would have more influence on the local political decision making.

Minister of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania **Tomas Žilinskas** noted that integration of refugees is a crucial and complicated issue. This issue is in the competence of Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania. The Government of Lithuania made a decision to reallocate 1,105 migrants. For Lithuania, it is a challenging task and a challenging number of refugees, because Lithuania does not have such experience in the process of integration. Moreover, society is against migrants. People do not want to rent their premises to migrants. Lithuanian language is not an easy to learn, even for Lithuanians. Nevertheless, Lithuania needs to fulfil its duty and reallocate those persons until the end of 2017. Currently, 117 persons have been reallocated.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are small countries, therefore the possibility that the number of refugees would increase in the following years creates great concerns. Nevertheless, the Baltic States should be prepared for this. Because no one can predict how the flow of migration will move if the current migration corridors will be closed. The Baltic States need to be prepared, need to safeguard borders and invest in borders smartly.

Session 2

Demographic situation in the Baltic States and state policy for family support: investments into welfare and growth

Vice President of the Baltic Assembly **Dr Giedrė Purvaneckienė** informed that the second thematic session is devoted to demographic situation in the Baltic States and state policy for family support.

The birth rates of a country are the best indicators that reflect the state policy for families. Birth rates comparing with 1990's have changed. The total fertility rate defines the average number of children a woman would have if she survives all her childbearing (or reproductive) years. According to data, the Baltic States only recently have regained the total fertility rate, which in 1990's was above 2. Number 2 is between the rate that indicates growing and decreasing number of population in a country. Usually politicians base their opinion on experience and not on research and use various myths about the birth rates.

Welfare Committee of the Baltic Assembly has identified that the demographic challenges emerge due to social and economic inequality. In such situations, governments may provide different solutions. Some governments may prefer to retain the same funding for social policy and funding for family care. Where other governments may prefer to decrease spending for family policy. This is the reason why there are differences in birth rates among the Baltic States. Parliamentarians must exchange information and share experience about best solutions in each country. Although demographic situation has improved during recent decades, since the Baltic States regained independence, the situation is not satisfactory.

Deputy Secretary General on Social Policy of the Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia **Rait Kuuse** underlined that the Baltic States have great challenges in improving demographic situation and ensuring wellbeing of our nations. Therefore, the Baltic States need decisions that would not border with routine reasoning. It is hard to predict which decision will have an impact on future wellbeing of people. Nevertheless, certain regularity of demographic processes can be foreseen. There are specific indicators that

signal about current processes in the Baltic States and they need to be considered. These indicators may help to take smart decisions.

The report is divided into three parts, such as: 1) comparative data on present situation in the Baltic States; 2) social protection; 3) challenges that are faced.

The main issue for the Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia is to ensure wellbeing of citizens in light of current and future changes. Economic development of countries cannot be ignored. These process have a great impact on social situation in a state.

Comparing the GDP in the Baltic States, it can be concluded that in recent years it has been increasing. Chart rates show that economy and social protection go hand in hand, but it is difficult to say which of them goes first. Links between these two fields are lineal, but interlinked. In Estonia, it is believed that the most accessible measure against poverty and to ensure wellbeing is labour activity. Although, labour activity is changing over time, it is possible to observe incensement in this area. Estonian employment indicators already exceed European targets by reaching 76%. Employment indicators of Latvia and Lithuania are close to Estonian.

In regard to social security the Baltic States are in equal situation. The Baltic States invest in the wellbeing of people through social sector and investments are almost in the same amount of funds. From this in can be observed that if economy is descending, states need to invest more in social sector. However, in reality it means that if economy is descending, the funds for social sector are also cut. Moreover, economic problems from 2007 are still felt. Comparing data with other Member States of the EU, the social protection expenses in the Baltic States are more than 10% less. This should be kept in mind.

Demographic changes in the population and the growing number of aged population is obvious. Increase of population cannot be observed in any of the Baltic States. There are certain improvement trends in Latvia and Lithuania, but population growth remains negative. It is often forgotten that reduction of population is not only an issue that includes birth rates, mortality of young people should also be included. Young men die due to reckless way of living that could be avoided. In Estonia, if the mortality rate of

young people could be decreased to minimum then the next problem would be aging of population. Short life spend also affect birth rates. In Estonia, it has been predicted that after few decades if the current trends continue, the overall population in state will be by 100,000 people less. Today, the opinion is divided on whether the future population forecasts are inevitable or can be changed. Of course, it is not comforting, but the rest of Europe deal with the same problems.

Demographic situation in the Baltic States is not slowed down by immigration, which means that migration is marginal. Nevertheless, the Baltic States are affected by increasing number of emigrants. Therefore, the Baltic States should take certain position.

Birth rates in the Baltic States continue to be below the reproduction level. The family policy measures have certain effect. In Estonia, parental benefit system, which has been called as the most generous in the world, helps families to feel secure. However, the effect has changed over time and births have reduced since the introduction of policy. The decision to have a child depends on many factors, not only on material possibilities. The lesson from Estonia is that no measure is eternal and if there is a wish to maintain development in a country, government needs to look further than providing of benefits. The key answer is – integrated approach. This would include measures to provide childcare more accessible.

People's wellbeing depends on many factors. Revising the world map and comparing different indicators it can be observed that situation is not pleasing in any of countries. Each state has its own problems and challenges. Integrity and unity of a community also affects the overall situation in a state.

The Baltic States should keep on following the Scandinavia example, vision and experiences. One indicator, which might have a great impact on slowing the demographic processes but will also affect social protection system, is the gender pay gap. Estonia has nothing positive to offer, because it has the widest pay gap in Europe. The gender inequality forces to rethink the social values. State needs to think on further measures that could improve the situation. It is difficult to observe whether the gender pay gap affects social security, but it will definitely affect the wellbeing of people today

and tomorrow. Social policy also affects the gender pay gap. Women mostly use Estonia's generous parental benefit system. Although, Estonia highly recommends such system there exist certain difficulty. If in long-term women do not engage in labour processes it in turn will affect their wellbeing. Moreover, it will also change the proportion of gender involved in labour. Therefore, Estonia constantly runs different campaigns to engage men in raising of children and using of parental benefits. Equal division of responsibilities will increase social unity. It is observed all over the world that men start to participate more in raising of children.

The next indicator that needs to be discussed is poverty. Poverty is a problem not only in Estonia. Relative poverty indicators in the Baltic States are similar, but in comparison with other Member States of the EU, the Baltic States have greater problems. Estonia has often held an opinion that relative poverty is not a good indicator, because it behaves not in a predictable manner in changes of economic cycles. During crisis, relative poverty reduced and during economic growth it increased, therefore it is difficult to find a measure that would be efficient in all situations. For that reason, it might happen that Estonia is the only European country that use the absolute poverty indicator. However, it is not easy, because absolute poverty rate reflects inequality in society. Observing data, the number of people living in poverty has increased faster than in average in Europe. The Baltic States need to ensure adequate support for those in need. Recently, Estonia increased benefits that help people to cope with very difficult situations. In Estonia, person needs to have at least EUR 130 for living after paying the costs for housing. It is important to follow the effect of social transfers in planning the policy for social protection. Therefore, country needs to find an answer to a question whether various social defence measures and decisions on supporting people actually help to reduce the poverty.

According to data, the amount of social transfers is less than the EU average. Therefore, the question remains whether all decisions are targeted towards increasing the social wellbeing. The more system is being fragmented through different political decisions, the worse become ability to effect peoples wellbeing.

Before planning any measure, it needs to be clearly understood whether particular service helps for those in need or government needs to target those persons better.

Family benefits in Estonia have been discussed a lot. Moreover, a decision to increase the universal family benefit has been made. Starting from year 2017, families with three children will receive EUR 400, families with four children will receive EUR 500 and families with seven children EUR 970 per/month. State also supports single parent families and provides other family benefits. According to date of absolute poverty rate, Estonia has managed to improve the wellbeing of a child. Nevertheless, additional solutions will be needed. It has been estimated that if a family with three children would not receive state benefits, it would be by 12% poorer than today. Social policy helps to ensure peoples wellbeing and sense of security.

Pension systems in the Baltic States differ in details. Due to difficult demographic situation, the population in the Baltic States has decreased. Pension and taxation systems have been constructed in a way that younger generations pay for their parents pensions. Therefore, the fact that younger generation is considerably smaller affects the pension system. Another significant factor is the perception of society. People tend to expect that pensions are a substitute income, which would form majority of salary they once received. However, this will not be the case. Today in Estonia, EUR 395 is a goal for an amount for average pension. Nevertheless, future predictions indicated that in reality it could be less then EUR 300. Moreover, the inequality of today's income affects the inequality of future pension. For that reason, the salary gap will become to a pension gap. Considering the situation, there have been discussion about changing the calculations for life expectancy and pension calculations as well as on more flexible retiring.

Such structural problems as gender salary gaps and pensions are transferring to other sectors and have even greater impact on future expectations. Revising the numbers of people who keep on working while receiving pension, the Baltic States rank high. Today, it is a very individual decision about when to retire. Demographic processes affect political choices, by idealising social protection it is only possible to compensate failure in other sectors. Therefore, the Baltic States should focus on measures on how to actually affect people's wellbeing. Many issues are worth considering and the Baltic States should remember that they are very similar.

Discussion

Senator, Vice Chair of the Foreign Affairs and European Union Committee, Senate of the Republic of Poland **Jaroslav Obremski** informed that heavy demographic problems exist also in Poland. According to data, approximately 2,000,000 citizens of Poland live outside its territory and most of them in the UK. The new Government of Poland has decided to start program “500 plus”. This program provides that for each child family receives EUR 120 per/month until child reaches the age of 18. Government has three basic objectives: 1) to boost the birth rate; 2) invest in human capital; 3) reduce poverty among population. Currently, it is too early to comment on particular changes in regard to birth rates. Nevertheless, it has positively affected and decreased the level poverty. This project is permanent and it increases the safety when family or single person decide to have a child.

Deputy Secretary General on Social Policy of the Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia **Rait Kuuse** underlined that in Estonia the family benefit system is also a permanent policy. The challenge remains to monitor also the existing policies and policy measures in wider context such as childcare, gender issues and others. It has been observed that benefit system has helped for those people, who were willing to have a child (or second and third) already a long time ago to make a decision. Moreover, it is also worth considering to make a particular emphasis in policy to encourage families to have second and third child.

Vice President of the Baltic Assembly **Dr Giedrė Purvanekienė** underlined that Welfare Committee of the Baltic Assembly should focus on the demographic issues also in future and promote exchange of information among the Baltic States involving also Poland and Nordic countries.

Session 3

Joint actions for development of regional transport infrastructure of the Baltic States

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** informed that third session will focus on joint actions for development of transport infrastructure in the region. Particular

emphasis will be on the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project, transport corridors, initiating of new projects and cross border cooperation. He underlined that all these issues will remain on the agenda of the Baltic Assembly also in the future until some tangible results will be achieved. Regular arrivals and departures of trains via *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* will ensure quick and convenient connections between the Baltic States and the Western Europe thus filling in gaps in the transportation of goods. There is no time and place for short-term interests or quarrels, because it will leave an immense impact on movement of people and cargo. This project will also contribute to the reduction of CO2 emissions and contribute to the growth of GDP. However, in order to implement this project and achieve the desired outcomes Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have to think into new categories. The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project is not only a good infrastructure project but also a solid foundation for security, wellbeing, economic growth and competitiveness.

Members of the Baltic Assembly were very concerned when in early September acknowledged about the inability of the Baltic States to agree on the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project during the meeting in Brussels in September 2016. Therefore, the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly used all available tools to mitigate these tensions between the involved parties. As a result, in late September – early October involved parties managed to sign contract on financing of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project. The Baltic Assembly has received a letter by the Baltic Council of Ministers in regard to implementation of the recommendations by the Baltic Assembly.

Advisor to the State Secretary, Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Latvia **Dins Merirands** noted that the Session of the Baltic Assembly is a proof than the Baltic States are able to reach agreements on regional level and in different areas. Although, all cooperation areas are significant, the transport sector is among priorities. Cooperation of the Baltic States is particularly important, because Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania need to understand and support each other. Mutual understanding and support needs to be maintained on daily basis, because development can be achieved only by cooperation. Individualism has positive aspects, but in long-term does not create added value. In terms of practical aspects, regional cooperation is also supported by the EU policies and can provide funding up to 80% of overall costs. This is another aspect that motivates countries to cooperate on regional scale.

The Baltic States have long history of collaboration in transport sector; have completed many projects and attracted foreign investments.

Currently, the most challenging joint project of the Baltic States is the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project. Historically, the Baltic States have had 1520 mm gauge railroad network. Since the Baltic States are fully-fledged Members of the EU, many projects have been implemented in railway transport, developing ports and air traffic connections. Implementation of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project will be the most challenging project in past 100 years. This project will also need to correspond to the common European standards. The Baltic States have managed to establish joint RB Rail company, which is the coordinator of funds. The Baltic States are also jointly working on intergovernmental contract ratified by parliaments. Each of countries is contributing to the project according to the time frame and is participating in all stages. In August 2016, all stakeholders have agreed on layout of the railway tracks, which will cross 15 municipalities. In decision-making process of railway tracks all together 35 institutions were involved and 500 people participated in negotiations.

The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project will not only contribute to the increase of GDP and reduction of CO2 emissions but also promote mobility and improve employment possibilities as well as strengthen geopolitical stability.

The *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project is not the only joint project by the Baltic States. *Via Baltica* is another regionally important transport route. It will join all three Baltic States with the rest of Europe. It is a large-scale project that involves reconstruction and resurfacing. It has been launched in 2004 and will be made until 2020. The work towards the *Via Baltica* in the Baltic States is made simultaneously. In Latvia, most of work was finished in 2007, when the Saulkrasti ring in length of 20 km was finished. This road will be equipped with smart signs informing drivers about weather forecast. This part will be implemented in between 2017-2018. *Via Baltic* project is also connected with participation of Finland and Poland.

In Latvia, roads between Bauska and Grenctāle, Medumi route and route from Nīca to Rucava have been reconstructed as well as in other parts of Latvia until the border of Lithuania. In 2017, reconstruction works of roads will be continued. Financing by the

EU has been greatly used in the transportation projects. A lot has been already achieved and finished and a lot will be done in future. Latvia is very thankful to have such partners as Estonia and Lithuania.

Discussion

Vice Chair of the European Union Affairs Committee, Sejm of the Republic of Poland **Konrad Glebocki** noted that it is very important to maintain close cooperation of all involved parties in implementation of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project. Poland is doing its homework and some projects for which Poland is responsible are being realised. Currently, Poland is reinforcing its railway infrastructure. Financial assistance from the EU 2020 funds will help in accomplishment of the works. Poland is willing to fully respect the agreed Joint Declaration concluded in 2015 in Riga.

Via Baltica is another project that is important for Poland. All aspects of transport corridors and transport networks connecting the North Sea and the Baltic Sea is of utmost importance for Poland. In order to fully implement *Via Baltica* route, all involved parties must do their homework.

Member of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly **Rytas Kupčinskas** informed that in the Final Document of the 34th Session of the Baltic Assembly parliamentarians are inviting Finland and Poland to be more active in implementing the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project.

According to the EU documents on freight carriages, 30% of freight must be carried by rail transport. The importance of the *Via Baltica* is indisputable. However, traffic on *Via Baltica* is very intense and pollution is also increasing. Therefore, more funding on modernisation of *Via Baltica* need to be allocated.

Politically, it would be reasonable to develop railway transport. He asked about possible obstacles for Finland and Poland in implementation of railway project.

Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Ādamsons** noted that the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* has become a political project and without involvement of Finland and Poland, it will remain to be rather a political than economical project. It would be even more interesting and economically viable if it would be possible to achieve cargo flows from Arkhangelsk to Europe.

He asked whether the Baltic States should think about more ambitious challenges and development of new transport highways such as transport road from Beijing to Europe through Riga.

Advisor to the State Secretary, Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Latvia **Dīns Merirands** informed that Poland and Finland do not have any formal obstacles for their involvement in the implementation of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project. They have been provided a possibility to become stakeholders in the RB Rail company and be involved in the Management Board. Financial possibilities could create some obstacles, but the most important aspect is that partners are observing and participating in the processes. The first stage of the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project is Tallinn-Riga-Kauņas. If the Baltic States succeed in the first stage then there is a higher possibility that other partners will also not lack behind and will take an active involvement.

It was mentioned that the environment policy is changing in Europe and that the rail transport is becoming more important. Ministries are thinking about environmental aspects not only in the perspective of the EU, but also in a wider context.

The potential of the highway from Beijing to Europe through Riga is being discussed, but as railway corridor. Currently, the first cargo freight from China to Riga is on its way and it should reach Riga in the next week. Plans about possible development of transport networks are being analysed. Railway routes from China, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Belarus to the Baltic States are under consideration.

In regards to transport corridor from Arkhangelsk/ Murmansk it will be considered if calculations about costs will be viable. Nevertheless, such calculations have not yet been made. An obstacle could be the difference of railway width with Russia.

Secretary General of the GUAM PA **Altai Efendiev** asked about the connection between the Baltic States and the Black Sea countries. GUAM PA is currently promoting the GUAM Transit and Transport Corridor. This project is becoming even more attracting corresponding to recent developments. GUAM countries have observed the tension on the Ukraine-Russia border, which is becoming even more intense and traditional markets have been blocked. Therefore, the GUAM Transit and Transport Corridor provides a viable alternative and connection opportunities. Moreover, China is recently considering to open of a new Silk Road, Iran is opening for new markets and is looking for access to European market. The idea of the GUAM Transit and Transport Corridor is to connect three seas – the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and Caspian Sea. He asked about possible cooperation between the Baltic States and GUAM countries to have stronger transport connections. He asked what should be done by the GUAM countries in order to use the full potential of transit possibilities.

Advisor to the State Secretary, Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Latvia **Dins Merirands** informed that the potential of the Black Sea countries including Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan has been discussed.

From the Baltic States side, this route already is developed and trains are available. The problem is with connection that goes through Ukraine and barely goes beyond its borders to Caspian Sea. Information has been received about active development or routes in Kazakhstan and GUAM countries. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan railway companies have come up with joint offer for railway transport corridor. According to information, ferry routes in the Black Sea are also being developed.

In the end of November 2016 in Kiev, a meeting of experts will be held. In this meeting, the best possible options for creation of diverse transport connections to create a single transport chain will be discussed. At the level of experts, particular focus should be on the agreement, which deadlines should be followed. At political level, it is very important to demonstrate that it is a necessary and prospective route, which should be supported.

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** underlined that the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project for may seems to be not economically viable, however looking in the long-term perspective this project is important for the region.

In 2016, the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee and the Welfare Committee of the Baltic Assembly actively worked on cross-border cooperation issues. Members of these committees have submitted recommendations for employment and transport development in the border areas. Cross-border cooperation is a field where the Baltic States have learned a lot from the Benelux countries. The Benelux cross-border cooperation and development is a model for the whole Europe.

Vice-Minister-President of the Government of Flanders, Flemish Minister for Budget, Finance and Energy **Bart Tommelein** noted that transport is of great importance ensuring development and economic strength for countries and regions. Isolated areas without strong infrastructure have less economic activity. Less economic activity means less prosperity.

Harmonisation of legislation is important in order to provide smoothly running transport throughout different countries. The Benelux countries are in favour to adjust legislation to another at the highest possible extent. Intelligent transport system are indispensable in the future. Safety on roads is another important issue that constantly needs to be revised and adjusted according to latest technologies.

Railway connections ensure that motorway car parks need to be less overloaded with trucks. Authorities also play an important role, because they are responsible for implementation and adjustment of new rules. If the rules are not easily to be controlled, overseen or adopted their necessity needs to be revised. If it is not possible to inspect observance of a rule, maybe it should be eliminated.

Working together is always more beneficial. At Benelux level, joint inspections are being organised. Together, the Benelux countries provide the necessary training of inspectors. Exchange of data is essential for inspections. Data is the ultimate weapon against fraud. Although, obviously one should ever disregard the protection of privacy. As a former Secretary of State, he has developed a Plan for Fair Competition together

with trade unions and employers. This plan contains thirty concrete measures to combat social dumping in transport sector. Many of these measures are implemented also at Benelux level. Similar actions could be agreed with other Member States of the EU. Belgium already has cooperation agreements with France and Bulgaria in fight against social fraud. It is also highly welcomed to develop cooperation agreement in fight against social fraud with the Baltic States.

Besides road transport, railway and air transport effective cooperation with different countries is possible. In future drones will be for transportation purposes. Currently, it is only possible in three countries in the EU and regulations about drones differ in each country.

Transport by railways offer many possibilities, if transport cooperation at several stages would include railway as the domestic transportation in the Baltic States, many costs would be reduced.

Transport and infrastructure are very important for economy. It is also in the interests of society to gradually switch to low-carbon transports. According to studies, every person lose 5 months of life due to particle pollution. Daily it cannot be felt, but it exists. The Flemish Government is fully committing itself on support of electric cars. There is a need to ensure more electric charging stations in order to ensure smooth transition to electric vehicles. The likelihood to lose power in a middle of a route scares many people, who otherwise would consider buying electric vehicles. According to plan, there is a need to ensure at least one charging stations for electric vehicles within every community by 2020. Flanders aims to have 100,000 environmentally friendly cars on roads by 2020. Government also promotes purchase of electric vehicles by providing premiums and bonuses. Nevertheless, it is presumed that this strategy will be implemented only in the initial phases.

CNG tank technology for trucks is an environmentally friendly alternative. Transport can be made more environmentally friendly not only by road traffic. In the field of water transport more work needs to be done. LNG vessels and terminals area already the first major step forward. The work towards greener transport for the future of our children needs to be continued. Therefore, the Flemish Government made a plan to

encourage development of environmentally friendly alternatives of carriage and ensure that environmentally friendly transport is economically attractive option.

If the Benelux Parliament and the Baltic Assembly would take a lead in development of environmentally friendly transportation, the rest of Europe will follow. It is not only the large countries that can set the lines, but also those with the greatest confidence. These sectors could include transport, sustainable development or social dumping. Together all the aims are achievable.

Addresses by foreign delegations and guests

Chair of the Finance and Mobility Committee of the Benelux Parliament **Willem Draps** noted that soon the Benelux Parliament and the Baltic Assembly will celebrate 25 years of cooperation. At that time, the Baltic States have just regained their independence. Political leaders of the Baltic States showed substantial political clearance for cooperation with other interparliamentary assembly's – the Nordic Council and the Benelux Parliament. In November 1992, Benelux Parliament supported cooperation with the Baltic Assembly. This was a strong political signal followed by establishment of strong ties and assistance in development of democratic structures and processes. It was not easy to turn the concluded Declaration into practice and ensure security of the Baltic States because competence of the Benelux Parliament does not cover security. Therefore, it was not possible for Benelux Parliament to conclude security agreement. Fortunately, predecessors understood that other cooperation formats would also promote cooperation ties. In 1994, the negotiation process was followed by adoption of a Joint Declaration aimed at cooperation in a number of specific domains such as foreign policies, energy, economics, culture and trans-border cooperation. Even today, the Joint Declaration is the foundation of cooperation. According to psychologist, 25 years is the age at which human being enter adulthood. Fortunately, the Baltic Assembly did not wait for too long and already started functioning in an adult way. By regular contact and exchange of information demonstrates that the Baltic States have managed its democratic formation in fine colours. Even if the remaining challenges are numerous, it is important to underline the past achievements.

Representative of the Joint Baltic American National Committee **Alexander Blums** underlined that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have maintained a tremendous progress over these past 25 years of independence. Much of which is due to excellent relations and cooperation between the three Baltic Republics. However, many challenges remain. Transportation infrastructure needs to be improved, the business environment needs to be enhanced so that people can benefit from more investment, labour mobility and sustainable development, cooperation with the Nordic countries needs to be continued. However, the most pressing issue remains the security of the Baltic States. Increased close cooperation among the Baltic States and the NATO allies is essential precondition to protect the sovereignty.

Joint Baltic American National Committee (JBANC) also benefits from increased cooperation of the Baltic States. For JBANC it mainly means coming together in times of trouble for the sake of preserving stability and security in the Baltic countries against threats. Therefore, the key to success for parliaments and governments of the Baltic States is to work together.

The USA play a great role in the NATO. Since the NATO is responsible for ensuring safety of the Baltic States, it is crucial that relations between the USA and the Baltic States remain strong. JBANS works closely with the USA Congress Administration, think tanks and other organisations to ensure that USA understands these relations. Particularly important sectors are the military, information, energy and border security. JBANC cooperate also with other international organisations in the USA including Ukrainian, Georgian and Belarussian communities to help to promote and foster security and spread Western values. JBANC also engage with Baltic diaspora communities in the USA to inform and encourage to remain active raising attention on Baltic issues. JBANC compound constituency of 1 million of USA citizens.

JBANC is always open for cooperation and is ready to provide any information about the USA policies and has the capacity to provide contacts in different fields eager to help for the success of the Baltic States.

Head of the Ukrainian delegation to the GUAM PA **Anatoliy Matviyenko** extended his gratitude for the received assistance and support to Ukraine.

In the East of Ukraine, a bloody warfare and aggression are implemented by Russia. Ukraine feels lack of support from the democratic community. Aggression by Russia is not against Ukraine, but against all democratic world. In this warfare, more than 10,000 people have been killed and 25,000 have been injured. In Crimea Russia has based its military troops and military weapons including nuclear weapons. In the East of Ukraine there are hybrid military troops.

Ukraine is spending around 9 million to be able to ensure its safety and resist Russia. There are Declarations that are not supported in practice and there are threats to activate the EU as fully-fledged members, and slow progress towards visa regime. Ukraine face also serious limitations in the area of business for economic cooperation. A myth that the Minsk Agreement is panacea has been created. They have been adopted under duress. There exists also a misperception that Ukraine will counteract military of Russia. There is also an increased rhetoric's about the complicated history of Ukraine. Ukraine has to do a lot and has to reform society.

He quoted Ukrainian writer: "Listen, how from the throat of the Europe's violent you can see the sounds of the influence of words." It is important to have simplicity of view, but it is even more important to have strategic cooperation solving issues especially for the Central and Eastern Europe.

Ukraine does not need gifts or presents. Ukraine wants to have a normal cooperation and dynamic development of our security.

Member of the Azerbaijani delegation to the GUAM PA **Ali Masimli** noted that participation of GUAM countries in the events of the Baltic Assembly is a good tradition that preferably will continue also in future. GUAM PA and the Baltic Assembly relations are strong and it can be seen at international level. GUAM countries are pleased to have such friends who share the same views and understand the sensitivities of the GUAM region. The high-level cooperation among the parliamentary assembly's is based on mutual benefit, mutual respect and confidence.

The foundation of this cooperation is the Declaration on cooperation between the Baltic Assembly and the GUAM PA that was signed in June 2009. Declaration defines many fields of cooperation from which one is the international cooperation.

GUAP PA appreciates this special friendship with the Baltic Assembly that has promoted cooperation with other interparliamentary organizations such as the Benelux Parliament, Nordic Council and Visegrad group and other bodies. Over the last past years the political dialogue has been deepening among the GUAM and the Baltic countries. It can be felt through exchange of visits at high and the highest level. GUAM countries have enriched its legal framework and have strengthened relations in bilateral and multilateral formats. Legislative bodies of GUAM and the Baltic States have good relations.

The visit by H.E. Ināra Mūrniece to Azerbaijan in early October 2016 needs to be highlighted. The cooperation at international level between the Baltic States and the GUAM countries increases national stability and security in the GUAM countries.

Implementation of large-scale transport projects in the region of GUAM by initiative of Azerbaijan improves the attraction of the GUAM region at international level and creates a bridge connecting Europe and Asia as well as increase the energy security of Europe.

Senator, Vice Chair of the Foreign Affairs and European Union Committee, Senate of the Republic of Poland **Jarosław Obremski** noted that it is necessary to maintain regional cooperation. The Baltic Assembly helps the EU, helps Brussels to see and understand the diversity of Europe. The Baltic Council of Ministers helps to see and strengthen your position in the EU on important decision-making processes. It is important and it is the success of the Baltic States.

Poland belongs to the Visegrad group and currently holds the presidency. This cooperation is important from different aspects and is fruitful.

He expressed his hope that it would be possible to develop closer cooperation with the Baltic Assembly and Baltic Council of Ministers. It is important for several reasons.

First, the Baltic States and Visegrad group countries share the same sensitivity towards the challenges from the East. The same approach in the activities with NATO towards the Russian aggression and the opinion that the GUAM countries should get closer to the EU.

Second, same opinion towards the energy policy. The Baltic States and Visegrad group countries share joint opinion towards the Nord Stream 2 and it is a good example of synergy.

Third, the Baltic States and Visegrad group countries share the similar thinking about the share of negotiations with the UK after the Brexit.

The last, in November 2016 the China Summit in Riga will be held. During this summit, the issue about the part of China within our region could be discussed. What are the current challenges and situation in the context of geopolitical policies strategies consequences.

Member of the Turkish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process **Hakan Çavuşoğlu** informed that the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) is unique cooperation forum as the example of regional ownership, which reflects the common will, and authentic voice of the Balkan countries. We have finally introduced an institutional structure to our 20 years old parliamentary cooperation by the establishment of the South East European Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly (SEECP PA) in 2014. In 2015, SEECP PA have realized the third plenary session in Sofia.

There are three general committees within SEECP parliamentary assembly. Turkey has assumed the Chairmanship of one of these committees namely the General Committee on Social Development, Education, Research and Science for the 2016-2017 period. I have the honour to be elected as the Chairperson of this committee and parliamentarians of the SEECP PA are doing their best to undertake useful activities for our region and for our people.

I am very glad to find the issue of migration within the programme of the session of the Baltic Assembly. Migration is an important problem for our countries and regions, it is very timely and all of us have greatly benefitted from the discussions today.

As a colleague of yours, coming from a country hosting approximately 3 million refugees from Syria, I think that it is necessary to reinforce cooperation among our countries and parliamentary assemblies and strengthen common stance established on the basis of universal liberal values against modern global challenges such as resisting the negative effects of the refugee crisis, combatting terrorism, tackling foreign terrorist warriors and combatting xenophobia and Islamophobia.

Our nation was shocked by a hateful coup attempt, which started on the night of 15 July 2016. This attempt targeted, among others, innocent civilians who peacefully stood against coup plotters to protect democracy, constitutional order, the rule of law and state institutions, as well as the homeland and the democratic will it put forward through legitimate elections. During the attacks in question, fighter aircrafts and helicopters bombed the campus of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, which is the national embodiment.

Availing myself of this opportunity, I would like to extend my gratitude, once again, to my counterparts who shared their commiserations with us regarding these deplorable events, conveyed messages of condolences and extended support to our democratic and legitimate parliament and government.

This coup attempt, staged outside the chain of command by a group of soldiers of different ranks and corps who were members of the Fethullah Gülenist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) remained limited in scope. This attempt cannot be imputed to our honourable army in its entirety over whose loyalty to our democracy and constitutional order we are in no doubt.

The coup attempt was thwarted by the selflessness of our nation, which fought to protect its freedom and democracy, and as things stand, a judicial process has started concerning the attempt. Information and documents seized during the initial investigations and searches revealed the severity of the situation and laid bare

significant evidence linked to thousands of people, including public officials. For this reason, it has become imperative for our government, acting by the power granted by the constitution, to declare a state of emergency across the country to allow us to take the most effective and swift actions to suppress this threat against democracy, rule of law, and the rights and freedoms of our citizens. However, the international community and our friends should have no doubt that the Republic of Turkey will conduct the state of emergency and judicial proceedings without compromising our respect for human rights, the rule of law, international standards and the universal principles of law in any way.

I believe wholeheartedly that the international community and our friends will extend support to the Republic of Turkey in its legitimate fight against the coup attempt staged by FETÖ, to which all political parties in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey resisted in unity.

I would like to express my wish for a more frequent and fruitful dialogue and cooperation between the South East European Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly and the Baltic Assembly in the forthcoming period.

Vice Chair of the European Union Affairs Committee, Sejm of the Republic of Poland **Konrad Glebocki** underlined the significance of cooperation and good relations between Poland and the Baltic States. Poland and the Baltic States share similar history, regained independence in the beginning of 90's, came through the same process in establishing democratic structures and in 2004 joined the EU.

Poland and the Baltic States share similar views on number of issues and as confirmation it was once again proven considering the themes of the present session and presented speeches.

After the Decision on Brexit and the referendum in the UK, the EU has found itself in a new situation. For the first time a country is willing to leave the union. The reaction by the society should not be only by comments, but also question oneself about the seriousness of the issue. Of course, there are no clear answers on many questions regarding this issue. However, there is one thing that should be done – states should

strengthen the role of national parliament within the EU. Moreover, economic integration should be continued. A lot needs to be done in such areas as - Digital Single Market, Energy Union and field of services. However, the approach should not be “more Europe”. The approach should be “union that consists from different countries, where each state is respected properly.”

Reports by the Presidium and the Budget and Audit Committee

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** informed that Latvia will remain as the presiding country of the Baltic Assembly until the end of 2016. Presidency in the Baltic Assembly is a great honour for the Latvian delegation and an opportunity to create added value. Looking on the issues that have been achieved in 2016 there is a need to thank each Member of the Baltic Assembly.

Last year, when the Latvian Presidency plan was introduced the aim was to achieve more inclusive policies between the parliaments and governments of the Baltic States. Revising the executive branch – stronger cooperation has been achieved. Latvian Presidency also made additional input to strengthen cooperation with the executive power. Apart from cooperation with the Baltic Council of Ministers, regular meetings were organised with ministries of Latvia to discuss various partnerships and cooperation projects. Two months ago, Latvian delegation met with Prime Minister of Latvia Māris Kučinskis to discuss the progress of the Latvian Presidency in the Baltic Assembly and to identify the areas in which more active cooperation with the Baltic Council of Ministers is desired. Based on well established tradition colleagues in Estonia and Lithuania were also kindly invited to strengthen cooperation with the Baltic Council of Ministers. More improved cooperation with the Baltic Council of Ministers will reflect on the implementation of the aims of the Baltic Assembly.

Parliamentary cooperation within the Baltic Assembly is strategically important for Latvia. It provides strong parliamentary tools to achieve the following goals. First, to pull resources and to reduce costs. Second, to integrate the Baltic Region as whole in Europe by establishing transport infrastructure and energy infrastructure connections. Third, represent the interest of the Baltic States more efficiently.

Today, the Baltic parliamentarians will approve the Resolution of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly, which includes approximately 40 very specific recommendations elaborated by the Committees. These recommendations are not just political declarations, they are rather targeted steps that need to be made in order to pull joint resources and capabilities to reduce costs and further integration of the Baltic States in Europe and represent the interests of our people. So far, the Baltic States have been successful in pulling resources and coordinating the fight of law enforcement agencies in fighting tax fraud and shadow economy. The Baltic States have also managed to establish organ transplantation system as a result of which many lives have been saved. The Baltic States have established the Baltic Innovation Fund and border guards cooperate while protecting common external borders. These are just couple of examples.

Nevertheless, more political support is needed in various areas. Closer cooperation of the Baltic States in attraction of foreign investment, economic cooperation and boosting of exports is needed. Today, during the Committee meeting, Lithuanian colleague informed that he had visited China where he presented the interests of Lithuania. However, no one in China was particularly interested. Maybe, it is better to present the joint interest of the Baltic States, because together the Baltic States have around 7 million inhabitants and jointly are more attractive for foreign investors.

The Baltic Assembly also put its efforts in achieving the signing of the joint agreement on the *Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica* project.

All issues on possible cooperation will continue to remain on the agenda of the Baltic Assembly. 25 years ago, the Baltic States joint and established the cooperation format of the Baltic Assembly. Comparing the political situation 25 years ago with the present, there should be no doubts about its efficiency and importance. The Baltic States were jointly fighting for joining the transatlantic family, withdrawal of the Soviet troops, joining the EU. Today, all of this and much more has been achieved. The Baltic Assembly focused mainly on practical cooperation and it achieved its goals.

The stability of current cooperation format does not mean that it is regressing. Negotiations at the regional level help the Baltic States to better prepare for discussion

at the EU level. In a year ago in interview, President of the Republic of Estonia H.E. Toomas Hendrik Ilves said: “Cooperation exists as long as you pay for it and you take care of it. Cooperation means to invest and to pay for joint projects. Cooperation means joint roads, railroads, anti-tank missile, etc. Everyone should contribute because cooperation means money, time and energy. It means that we also need people who work on this cooperation.” Cooperation means not only political cooperation and ability to agree, but also investment. The Baltic States need to invest more in the Baltic Region by strengthening national and regional security and growth. This is how the Baltic States will invest in the long-term interest of our nations.

Chair of the Budget and Audit Committee of the Baltic Assembly **Juris Viļums** introduced with the report on implementation of the 2015 budget and 2017 draft budget of the Baltic Assembly. These reports were drafted in cooperation with the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly.

The revenue of the 2015 budget was EUR 274,140 and the main items included are the following EUR 10,990 for the Presidium, EUR 250 for the Budget and Audit Committee, EUR 74,157 for international cooperation (organisation of international parliamentary seminars, cooperation with the Nordic Council, cooperation with the Benelux Parliament, cooperation with the GUAM PA, etc), EUR 11,102 for informational activities (medals, organisation of the webpage, Basketball Tournament), EUR 46,308 for the Baltic Assembly Prize for Literature, the Arts and Science, EUR 72,969 for the Secretariat, EUR 635 for unplanned expenses. Total budget expenditure for 2015 was EUR 243,763.

The budget for the 2017 of the Baltic Assembly remains approximately the same as for the past seven years. When the Baltic Assembly reduced it's budget due to economic crises.

The total budget for 2017 is expected in amount of EUR 281,744. The main items included are the following EUR 38,000 for the Session of the Baltic Assembly and Baltic Council of Ministers, EUR 12,660 for the Presidium, EUR 500 for the Budget and Audit Committee, EUR 91,387 for international cooperation, EUR 13,733 for international activities and other events, EUR 51,656 for the Baltic Assembly Prize for

Literature, the Arts and Science, EUR 73,208 for the Secretariat, EUR 600 for unplanned expenses.

The idea of the annual Basketball Tournament needs to be developed. In 2016, it was not held due to objective reasons. Maybe, the sport in which the tournament is organised could be changed periodically or add some academic/ intellectual sphere. Joint activities strengthen cooperation between the Baltic parliamentarians and further various ideas and goals. Another initiative could be special training for the new parliamentarians in the Baltic Assembly.

Detailed report on the usage of the budgets is available.

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** introduced with the draft documents, which have been submitted to the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly:

- Resolution of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly, which includes recommendations on refugee crisis, cooperation of law enforcement institutions, closer cooperation of border guard services, demographic situation and state policies for family support, protection of the rights of a child and citizens of the Baltic States residing abroad, cooperation in the energy sector, transport and infrastructure, economic cooperation, joint health care projects as well as cooperation in education, innovation and research sector;
- Decision on the implementation of the Report of the Budget of the Baltic Assembly for 2015;
- Decision on the Budget of the Baltic Assembly for 2017;
- Decision on the Revoking of the Regulations for Publishing of the Works of the Baltic Assembly Prize Winners;
- Final document of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly in which the Baltic Assembly defined priorities for the next year under Estonian Presidency.

With unanimous decision, the Baltic Assembly adopted the following documents of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly:

- Resolution of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- Decision on the implementation of the Report of the Budget of the Baltic Assembly for 2015;

- Decision on the Budget of the Baltic Assembly for 2017;
- Decision on the Revoking of the Regulations for Publishing of the Works of the Baltic Assembly Prize Winners;
- Final document of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly.

Election of the President and Vice Presidents for 2017

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

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

Election of the Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons of the committees for 2017

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

Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee

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

Education, Science and Culture Committee

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

Natural Resources and Environment Committee

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

Legal Affairs and Security Committee

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

Welfare Committee

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

Budget and Audit Committee

- Toomas Kivimägi, Chair, Estonia
- Irena Degutienė, Vice Chair, Lithuania
- Juris Viļums, Vice Chair, Latvia

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** informed that due to parliamentary elections in Lithuania, some changes in the Lithuanian delegation are expected. During the first meeting of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly in 2017, the new Lithuanian delegation to the Baltic Assembly will be approved.

Address by the newly elected President of the Baltic Assembly for 2017

Vice President of the Baltic Assembly **Helir-Valdor Seeder** noted that Latvian colleagues raised the bar very high and the Estonian Presidency will try to continue with the same political commitment and fervour.

Today, European countries go through very challenging times. We have to deal with wide range, massive and complex issues at the same time. Migration and refugee crisis, Brexit, high degree of acrimony and lack of trust among EU Member States, economic fragility, security concerns, terrorism are only some of challenges. In these turbulent times, Estonia is not only taking presidency in the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers but is also preparing for its first Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Latvian and Lithuanian partners gave greatly supported Estonia along with sharing experience and best practice.

The Baltic States will be able to overcome all those challenges if we act in a united and cooperative manner. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are not passive by-standers in this challenging environment. I am confident that our Baltic regional cooperation is also one of the answers to the challenges we – Europeans – have to tackle in our everyday life. Jointly, we manage protection of external borders of the European Union. Jointly, the Baltic States develop defence capabilities and thus contribute to strengthening of security architecture. Jointly, we work closely and coordinate our positions within the European Union. Jointly, we launch and implement different partnerships in health care, education, cybersecurity, digital economy and other fields.

Estonian Presidency affirms the promise of the Baltic cooperation and solidarity. Our Baltic nations are not just bounded together by a geographical location. We are bounded together by our special Baltic roots, European and transatlantic values and persistent willpower of our nations. We are bounded together by practical ordinary problems and by a common vision of our common future. Estonian Presidency will continue the path what founders of the Baltic Assembly twenty-five years ago hoped for – secure, well-connected and prosperous Baltic region in a united Europe.

Motto of the Estonian Presidency is Confidence, Community and Commitment. These three keywords contain sound foundation for the parliamentary cooperation of the Baltic States in the following priorities of the Estonian Presidency. First, strengthening of security and defence cooperation of the Baltic States. Second, comprehensive approach to energy market, transport and infrastructure. Third, smart solutions towards education, innovation and research.

Baltic cooperation has solved many issues. But a lot remains to be done. There are many fields where the Baltic parliamentary cooperation has to perform as an icebreaker. Estonian Presidency believes that we still have to serve as icebreaker when dealing with transport and infrastructure, fully integrated energy market, agriculture, education and research, green growth, defence and security and other issues. Estonian Presidency is determined that present and future Baltic nations need modern railroads and highways to speed travel and business, modern schools and universities to train our employees, modern defence infrastructure to safeguard our people.

By looking at the agenda and working plan of the Estonian Presidency, which will start on 1 January 2017, you will find concrete and practical issues. We will continue our efforts to make *RailBaltic/RailBaltica* project real. We will focus on joint actions to develop defence infrastructure and strengthen border management as well as foster joint bilateral and trilateral military procurements. Exchange of best practices regarding migration crisis and reception of refugees will be on the agenda of the Baltic parliamentary cooperation. Vocational education and flexible marketing of working force, agriculture and agricultural trade, joint health care projects and preservation of cultural heritage, cooperation of rescue services and civil protection are only few issues on the agenda of the Baltic Assembly under the Estonian Presidency. We will be developing regional partnerships and networks with our Nordic, Benelux, GUAM and Visegrad partners. I believe that these are those priority fields where the Baltic cooperation has to be more active.

Estonians have been called in the Baltic cooperation as troublemakers. The Baltic cooperation is vital for Estonia. Therefore, we aim to strengthen the power and capacity of the cooperation and institutions. We have always understood - when time and environment change, so must we. Baltic cooperation has been tested by crises we have went through. I believe that the new model which the Parliament of Estonia has applied for the new Estonian delegation with aim to involve standing committees of the national parliaments in the work of the Baltic Assembly – has proved to be right. As Chair of the Estonian delegation, I would like to invite our Lithuanian colleagues to follow the approach in formation of the new delegation, based on the Estonian model.

Over the coming twelve months of the presidency, Estonian delegation will rely on your support, cooperation and partnership. This will be crucial if we want to build strong alliances and practical partnerships for our Baltic nations.

“Koos oleme tugevamad”, “Vienots spēks ir stiprāks”, “Vienas jēga yra stipresnē”

**Signing of the Final Document
of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly**

President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** announced that the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly is closed. National delegations were invited for signing the Final Document of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly.

Report of the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly and 22nd Baltic Council was approved on 29 November 2016.

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

President of
the Baltic Assembly

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Valerijus Simulik
Republic of Lithuania

Jānis Vucāns
Republic of Latvia

Helir-Valdor Seeder
Republic of Estonia

Marika Laizāne-Jurkāne
Secretary General of the Baltic Assembly

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