



Report of the
36th Session of the Baltic Assembly and 23rd Baltic Council
9-10 November 2017, Tallinn (Estonia)

1. Presiding officers of the Session:

- **Aadu Must**, President, Chair of the Estonian delegation, Estonia
- **Valerijus Simulik**, Vice President, Chair of the Lithuanian delegation, Lithuania
- **Jānis Vucāns**, Vice President, Chair of the Latvian delegation, Latvia

2. Agenda of the Session:

- Meeting of the Presidium, Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Committees of the Baltic Assembly;
- Meeting of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly and the Speakers of the national parliaments;
- Opening of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- Award ceremony of the Medals of the Baltic Assembly;
- The 23rd Baltic Council;
- Signing of the Joint Statement;
- Continuation of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- Session 1: Securing external borders of the European Union;
- Session 2: Synchronisation of the Baltic electricity networks with the European Networks;
- Session 3: Baltic Alliance of Apprenticeship and Work Based Learning (BAfA);
- Session 4: Health care and efficient use of resources allocated for the healthcare – accessibility, timeliness and quality;
- Remarks by foreign delegations and guests;
- Report of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly about the implementation of the Estonian presidency programme and introduction to the Resolution and Final Document of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly;

- Report of the Budget and Audit Committee of the Baltic Assembly;
- Adoption of the Resolution and Final Document of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- Address by the newly elected President of the Baltic Assembly;
- Signing of the Final Document of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly.

Opening of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly

President of the Baltic Assembly **Aadu Must** opened the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly. Everyone in the Session are united by one mission - to discuss current affairs and cooperation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, to assess implementation of the Estonian presidency programme and to set aims for the Baltic cooperation under Lithuanian Presidency. Everyone in the Session are united by one conviction – that cooperation of the Baltic States is not an option, but “must”. The voice of the Baltic States sounds three times louder when all three countries speak together compared to individually. Actions of the Baltic States are three times stronger when the three countries act together compared to individually.

He expressed his appreciation to Speakers of the national parliaments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, members of the national parliaments, governmental representatives, colleagues from international organisations and 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 **Aadu Must** underlined that on the agenda of the Session of the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council are issues of significant relevance for the Baltic States. The Session is divided in four thematic sessions. First, securing external borders of the European Union. Second, synchronisation of the Baltic electricity networks with the European Networks. Third, cooperation of the Baltic States in education and science by focusing on the Baltic Alliance of Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning. The last, health care and efficient use of resources allocated for the healthcare – accessibility, timeliness and quality.

These issues are only part of the agenda of the Baltic Assembly. During the year of the Estonian presidency, agenda was comprehensive and multidimensional. Joint military procurements, development of defence infrastructure, regional gas and electricity market, coordinated border management, strategic communication, support to the Eastern Partnership countries, migration and refugees, automatic recognition of diplomas and degrees in the Baltic States, joint health projects, economic cooperation, joint transport and infrastructure projects are those issues on which members of the Baltic Assembly jointly with governmental representatives worked during the year of the Estonian presidency.

There are fields where the Baltic cooperation is a great success such as tourism, education, transport, etc. There are fields, where the Baltic States have different views. There are fields, where cooperation is still hindered by mutual competition and short-term arguments for non-cooperation. Perhaps, today, some of the projects may seem to be expensive and too complicated but in long-term these projects will be beneficial for growth and welfare of our Region. Seven years ago, to many of us it seemed that joint procurements of medicaments will be impossible and will cost a lot of efforts. Today, the Baltic States can bear fruits of the Baltic Assembly work and cooperation because due to the joint procurements of vaccines the Baltic States saved almost EUR 2 million for health care budgets. The 36th Session will set new and ambitious goals for the work of the Baltic Assembly for the forthcoming year.

President of the Riigikogu of the Republic of Estonia **H.E. Mr Eiki Nestor** underlined that the high number of participants is a sign that the Baltic cooperation continues to be meaningful and mutually beneficial.

Last year, the Baltic Assembly celebrated the 25th anniversary. The Baltic Assembly is a compass that keeps the Baltic States on the right course in the changing world in spite of the storm winds. Next year, the Baltic States will celebrate the 100th anniversary of independence. The price of freedom and independence can never be too high.

On Independence Day, the third-grade pupils of a basic school on one of the most beautiful islands of Estonia were telling what they liked in Estonia and what could be better. He quoted the answer of one girl to that question: “Estonia is a beautiful country,

and there may never be war here again. I am not afraid there will be.” These words contain the greatest gratitude the new generation can express to the older generation. In order for the coming generations to have what to hold dear and to keep, it is necessary today first of all to deal with ensuring security both at home and in the Baltic Sea region as a whole. Unfortunately, or, fortunately, there is no point in arguing with geography. Fortunately, because we are mostly surrounded by Nordic and friendly countries that respect international law. And, unfortunately, because we have an eastern neighbour behaving like a wolf who always looks towards the forest, like an Estonian proverb says. Russia’s ever-increasing aggressiveness, arbitrary interpreting of armament control obligations and insolent demonstrations of strength in our air space and sea do not leave much room for play – implementation of the decisions of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Warsaw summit is and will be priority number one. Estonia highly appreciates the contribution of the Alliance to strengthening the Eastern flank, and has done everything possible that the allies would feel at home.

The second pillar of the life insurance of Estonia, the European Union (EU), is at the crossroads, and is looking for its face and place in the networked world. Discussion on the future of the EU has kicked off dynamically. Different positions form a complicated equation and its solution must give an answer to the question where the future is steering us. It is time for the Baltic States to sit down and agree upon what kind of a common home we want, and to join our forces to achieve the best result. It is in the interests of the Baltic States to have a united, strong and open Europe. As President of the European Council Donald Tusk aptly said – united we stand, divided we fall. As a convinced supporter of open society, I have said, and I repeat also today – withdrawal into oneself is not an answer to our troubles (you simply cannot put the toothpaste back into the tube).

Secure Baltic Sea and sustainable Europe form the basis for the welfare of citizens in the region. As politicians, we know that the voters expect us to hear and understand their worries. In the course of years, the purpose of the Baltic Assembly has been that an ordinary person does not have to rack their head over whether Janis from Latvia, who has fallen on Kuutsemäe ski slope, will get help at the nearest emergency medicine unit in Estonia, or if Laima, who has acquired a speciality in Lithuania, will get work in Riga without excessive bureaucracy. Covering of the cross-border vodka rally in the

media may bring many clicks, but in real life there are more important problems we have to face every day. A safe living environment, a sustainable infrastructure and energy policy, an innovative education and research system, and knowledge-based economy are the sectors where the Baltic States have to, and are ready to cooperate.

Whatever the future brings, the fundamental values of Baltic cooperation are there and will always be. Similar historical experience and common values and traditions create a strong basis for cooperation in the spirit of true parliamentarism. For cooperation that has been tested in crises and has no alternative.

Next year, in 2018, Lithuania will take over the leading role in Baltic cooperation. He wished strength and enthusiasm for the Lithuania. And continued that although it is said that no initiative goes unpunished, he promised that on his behalf no good initiative will be hampered by Estonia, if its aim is the continuous development of the region and increasing the welfare and security of the Baltic citizens.

Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania **H.E. Viktoras Pranckietis** expressed his appreciation for the Estonian presidency in the Baltic Assembly and organisers of the Session. Lithuania is very satisfied about the many achievements such as the joint military procurements, procurements of medicines and aiming at establishment of joint education space. Proposal of Health Minister of Lithuania Mr Aurelijus Veryga to provide free provision of medical services for citizens living in cross-border areas in Lithuania and Latvia. The Lithuanian Presidency in the Baltic Assembly next year coincides with the centenary anniversaries of the reestablishment of the Baltic States. This provides Lithuania with unique opportunity to assess the past that the Baltic nations have already taken and to review the strategic development guidelines of the Baltic States and the Baltic region in order to ensure prosperity and wellbeing of the Baltic nations, to strengthen security and defence and to defend our hard-won independence. This also provides with unique opportunity to increase presence of our countries in the world and to demonstrate the unity the Baltic States. The Baltic States should closely coordinate activities in strategic areas in Baltic foreign security and defence policy. As Lithuania take over the responsibility for development of cooperation of the Baltic States and further implementation of joint projects, Lithuania realised that today, as never before it is crucial to exchange experience to

joint efforts in both the resilience of our societies to address new challenges and to combat hostile propaganda. In order to create Baltic region of prosperous economy it is crucial to strengthen the resilience of the Baltic economies, increase competitiveness of entire Baltic region and to make it more attractive for investors. Joint strategic infrastructure projects of the Baltic States such as the *Via Baltica* and the *Rail Baltica project* will be instrumental to fulfil the objectives. They will increase the competitiveness of the Baltic States and become part of the Regions security.

The Baltic States should not become a hostage of the system and aim to as swift as possible synchronization of the Baltic power grids to the Continental European Networks. The Baltic States have to adopt the decisions at the Baltic level concerning the safest and the most cost-efficient scenario. It is very important to develop regional markets for gas and electricity. It is important to continue joint efforts in establishment of transparent conditions for regional gas and electricity market, attract investment to attract new market participants and to promote competitiveness. The Baltic States have to make every effort to adopt final decision, already this year, concerning the development of economically viable long-term regional projects. The Baltic States also need to jointly apply for the EU financial support in order to implement coordinated regional solutions. It is very important to cooperate with the neighbouring countries – Poland and Finland – and to engage them more actively in development of regional market for gas and electricity.

Deep economic integration of the Baltic States, establishment of the joint education space, and promotion of the economic growth will have a positive effect in addressing the brain-drain and emigration of the labour force from the Baltic States. Deeper integration with the Eastern Partnership countries will also have a positive implication on the Baltic region. Lithuania supports the visa free regimes and the Association Agreements with Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. In two weeks' time the Eastern Partnership Summit will be held. Therefore, the Baltic States will continue also to further maintain matters of Eastern Partnership countries high on the EU agenda. In Moldova, soon elections will be held. For that reason, the issue of democracy in Moldova is very important.

The issue of nuclear safety is highly important for the Baltic region. The Astravyets nuclear power plant in Belarus is being constructed in violation of the International Convention on Nuclear Safety. After Lithuania adopted the Decision to prevent access to its energy system of electricity generated in unsafe nuclear power plants, the Astravyets nuclear power plant might become a huge and potentially unbearable burden for the Belarussian economy. The unsafe Astravyets nuclear power plant constitutes a problem not only for the Baltic States, but also to the whole EU. Therefore, Lithuania is looking forward for active support of its position towards the threat posed by the Astravyets nuclear power plant.

The Baltic State should make every effort to be united, to share best practices and to develop economies and societies resilient to new challenges and potential threats.

Speaker of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia **H.E. Ms Ināra Mūrniece** congratulated Estonia on holding a presidency not only in the Baltic Assembly, but also in the Council of the EU.

The greatest value added by the Baltic Assembly is the practical cooperation. By each year the cooperation between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is becoming more practical and focused on achievable targets. During these years, many valuable projects have been started and important lessons have been learned. The Baltic States should hold together in order to be stronger. Although there have been times, when the Baltic States held different positions, the three states always manage to achieve good solutions, find common denominators and act jointly. During the meeting with President of the Republic of Estonia H.E. Ms Kersti Kaljulaid and Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania H.E. Viktoras Pranckietis the themes discussed included cooperation of the Baltic States and joint projects. Conclusion from the meeting is that the vision of the Baltic States about what is happening currently and how the three states should work together is similar. The Baltic States also share joint view about the issues on global agenda. As have been mentioned by President of the Riigikogu of the Republic of Estonia H.E. Mr Eiki Nestor and Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania H.E. Viktoras Pranckietis the priority of the Baltic States is security. The Baltic region is facing real military threat. Therefore, the presence of the NATO troops should not be underestimated. Latvia is very grateful for support by the allied partners

and due to the presence of the NATO troops during Russian military exercises “Zapad”, we felt safe. Nevertheless, there still is a long way to go towards implementation of the Warsaw decisions and combat capabilities need to be strengthened both on land and air. The Baltic States need to continue to strengthen defence systems, therefore in 2018 Latvia will reach the 2% GDP in defence spending. However, it is not enough to ensure only the capabilities, the Baltic States need to involve also people to raise the awareness and support for defence issues. People need to be aware about the security situation and need to know that it is also their duty to ensure security.

Energy and transport is closely linked with the security and safety issues. The Rail Baltica project is project of the century from the perspective of security and freedom of movement. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have ratified the project by Intergovernmental Agreement, which is a clear signal that the Baltic States will do everything needed to ensure successful implementation of the Rail Baltica project. Parliamentarians should work actively to convince also Finnish and Polish counterparts about the involvement in Rail Baltica project.

Work in synchronisation of gas market is another important task. In April 2017, Latvia opened its gas market, which was a major step towards closer integration within the European networks. This has been appreciated by the market. She expressed her appreciation to the Estonian presidency and Baltic Council of Ministers for organising special visits to the Inčukalns, Paldiski and other gas storages for the Prime Ministers of the Baltic States. Energy security is also very important from the perspective of Eastern Partnership. It is seen that in Ukraine, Russia still continues its military activities and Russia’s aim is to weaken the Eastern Partnership countries. Therefore, the international pressure towards Russia should not be decreased at least until full implementation of the Minsk Agreement and the sanctions imposed by the EU against Russia should not be lifted. Sometimes it is difficult to understand the opinion expressed by Western colleagues that they will continue not to recognise occupation of Crimea. Due to the embargo, losses by the Baltic States in terms of market income from Russia have been mitigated by finding other market opportunities. Despite Kremlin’s propaganda, people should not fall into media trap of false information, but stand strong for the values that are important for the Baltic States. The EU and the

NATO are adapting to the new circumstances such as the hybrid warfare. Baltic-Nordic cooperation is also very focused on countering hybrid threats.

Eastern Partnership is high on the agenda of the Baltic States. This year, the Eastern Partnership Summit will be held in Brussels and will be led by one of the Baltic countries. It shows that it is not only a priority for Eastern Partnership countries but also for the whole EU. The Summit will be important in terms of giving political support and discussions on practical cooperation, such as trade, energy sector and building of institutional capacity. The Baltic and Nordic countries have established a tradition of visiting the Eastern Partnership countries. The solidarity showed by the Baltic – Nordic countries and support to our partners in Kiev, Tbilisi and Kishinev means a lot for them. Speaker of the Saeima invited the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council to continue fruitful cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries and to continue implementation of joint projects, which is a way to strengthen our common values – peace, democracy and international law.

Yesterday, during the Baltic Assembly Prize awarding ceremony we saw how rich the Baltic cultures are. Next year, when the Baltic States will celebrate the centenaries, the three Baltic countries will join in common celebrations and will jointly present Baltic values in international area.

Speaker of the Saeima expresses conviction that the upcoming Lithuanian Presidency in the Baltic Assembly will be target oriented and will support the Eastern Partnership countries.

President of the Baltic Assembly **Aadu Must** expressed appreciation to Speakers of the Parliaments of the Baltic States for participation in the Session of the Baltic Assembly. He underlined that by combining joint efforts the Baltic States will continue to develop the Region and strengthen interactions.

Award ceremony of the Medals of the Baltic Assembly

President of the Baltic Assembly **Aadu Must** opened the ceremony of the Medals of the Baltic Assembly. At this ceremony, the Baltic Assembly pay tribute to special

people. Recipients of the Baltic Assembly Medals in their daily work have attested special faithfulness and devotion to cooperation of Baltic nations and prosperity of Baltic region. These people are special Baltic Ambassadors who bring the Baltic name and brand worldwide. The Medal is a sign of true friendship among three Baltic countries and a sign of regional networking. He expressed his gratitude to recipients of the Baltic Assembly Medals for unselfish work in past, present and future.

Medals of the Baltic Assembly were awarded to:

- **H.E Ms Dalia Grybauskaitė**, President of the Republic of Lithuania, has been awarded with Medal of the Baltic Assembly no. 320 for an active and relentless campaigner for Baltic unity and cooperation.
- **H.E. Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, has been awarded with Medal of the Baltic Assembly no.321, for contributing of strong and future-oriented partnership of the Baltic States.
- **H.E. Mr Linas Linkevičius**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, has been awarded with Medal of the Baltic Assembly no.322, for developing of regional networks among the Baltic States.
- **Algirdas Butkevičius**, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania, Member of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania has been awarded with Medal of the Baltic Assembly no.323, for contribution to the cooperation of the Baltic States.
- **Anatoliy Matvijenko**, Head of the Ukrainian delegation to the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly, has been awarded with Medal of the Baltic Assembly no.324 for strengthening of friendly relations between the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly and the Baltic Assembly and contributing to the friendly relations between both parliamentary organisations (*Mr Matvijenko was not able to be present*).

- **Helga Elizabeth Merits**, Journalist and Director of the documentary film *The Story of the Baltic University* has been awarded with Medal of the Baltic Assembly no. 325 for promoting cultural approaching of our Baltic nations.
- **Imants Parādnieks**, Vice Chair of the Welfare Committee of the Baltic Assembly has been awarded with Medal of the Baltic Assembly no.326 for advocating of interests of the Baltic countries and paying special attention to address issues of welfare, protection of children rights and demographic issues.
- **Alo Ritsing**, Director and Conductor at several Baltic Students' Song Festivals and Dance, Festivals Gaudeamus has been awarded with Medal of the Baltic Assembly no. 327 for his devotion to refine and develop national traditions of the Baltic nations.
- **Haana Zuba-Reinsalu**, Director of Luua Forestry School and organiser of the Baltic Games and Baltic professional craftsmanship competitions has been awarded with Medal of the Baltic Assembly no. 328 for her unwearingly efforts to bring Baltic nations together and strengthen people-to-people contacts.
- **Marcel Oberweis**, Vice President of the Benelux Parliament, has been awarded with Medal of the Baltic Assembly no.312 for his active contribution to regional cooperation in an enlarged Europe. The Baltic Assembly greatly appreciates contribution of Marcel Oberweis in promoting the cooperation between the Benelux Parliament and the Baltic Assembly.

The 23rd Baltic Council

President of the Baltic Assembly **Aadu Must** underlined that the Baltic Assembly highly estimates cooperation between with the Baltic Council of Ministers under the Estonian presidency. Cooperation between both cooperation pillars, between parliamentarians and governments has become concrete, focused on practical projects and partnerships. This is what people expect from Baltic cooperation, namely, to have practical orientation and results. President of the Baltic Assembly expressed personal

gratitude to Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Baltic States – Sven Mikser, Edgars Rinkēvičs and Linas Linkevičius and also to their teams for persistence and commitment towards strong Baltic Region.

All participants of the Session have in their folders the overview on the implementation of the recommendations of the Baltic Assembly by the Baltic Council of Ministers for 2016 – 2017. This overview clearly demonstrates efficiency of cooperation and orientation towards practical partnerships of the Baltic States. In the opening of the Session, there are real, practical results concerning joint health care cooperation, cooperation in tourism sector, cooperation in education and research. The Baltic States hold mutual consultation about the EU issues, for example, about Brexit, Common Agricultural Policy and Multiannual Financial Framework. Cooperation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in security and defence is stronger as ever before. Jointly, the Baltic States support the Eastern Partnership countries, make serious steps towards implementation of joint transport and infrastructure projects and continue work for common energy market.

In 2017, cooperation of the Baltic States was based on three main cooperation priorities. Firstly, strengthening of security within the region, enhancement of security and defence cooperation; secondly, developing regional energy market; thirdly, developing transport connections.

Chair of the Cooperation Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia **H.E. Mr Sven Mikser** noted that it has been more than 26 years since Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania regained their independence. Almost unnoticeably greatest part of this time the Baltic States have been members of the EU and the NATO. Traditionally, the Baltic cooperation, which was introduced more than 20 years ago was focused on foreign and security issues of the region. Some of these issues have included common challenges in ever changing situation in Europe and world as well as security situation. Other matters have included more joint interest of the Baltic States in the region – challenges and problems. The first category includes foreign and security policy challenges. The second category includes energy, transport, communication systems, defence, domestic and legal issues, education, environment and other fields of practical cooperation. Based on the experience of recent years, the

Baltic States need to make speedy progress in regional energy market, regional transport connections, security and defence cooperation. These issues have been the priority topics for the Baltic Council of Ministers in 2017.

Since the middle of 2017, Estonia has a responsible task to hold a Presidency in the Council of Europe. This was a first-time experience for Estonia. Fortunately, Estonia had a chance to learn from Baltic neighbour's experiences. Estonia's Presidency programme includes forming priorities in united Europe with fundamental values. First priority is an open and innovative European economy, second, safe and secure Europe, third, a digital Europe and the free movement of data, fourth, an inclusive and sustainable Europe. In order to adopt to the consequences of globalisation the first measuring indicator of success is and will be the wellbeing and security of citizens.

In foreign and security policy Estonian presidency priorities in Europe and in the Baltic States the focus is put on neighbourhood policy including everything connected to the Eastern Partnership of the EU, defence and security cooperation. Estonia has been focused on broad cooperation with Eastern partners. Estonia has improved the political visibility of the Eastern Partnership through a number of presidency events, introducing it into the EU debates. The Eastern Partnership Summit in November of this year will summarise the work so far and will provide guidelines on how to further tighten cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus. In order to support the objectives in the upcoming summit, Estonia has organised four ministerial level meetings with the Eastern partners – foreign, digital, legal, transport and internal affairs ministers have convened in joint meetings. In addition, Estonia hosted the Eastern Partnership civil society and business forums uniting large number of representatives from the EU and civil society and business representatives from all six Eastern Partnership countries. Estonia's intention was to encourage Eastern countries, support the needed reforms and thus bring them closer to Europe, improve their living standards and security of their citizens. It is important to help partners of the Baltic States to implement their reforms, to stimulate their economies and competitiveness and connections with the EU as well as strengthen personal contacts. Eastern Partnership and enlargement are two different EU policies, but it is necessary to acknowledge the aspirations towards Europe of associated countries. Estonia believes that this strategic course of action will be the political foundation of the

relevant reforms of Eastern neighbours that are inspired by Europe. Yet, it is also important for our partners to firmly believe that these reforms are carried out for the benefit of themselves – their societies and people – and not to tick some box to show the EU institution. The task of the EU is to acknowledge politically, morally and financially serious efforts and success of reform implementation.

Another field that requires constant and close cooperation of the Baltic States is security. From the perspective of the EU presidency country the rapid developments in the EU security and defence policy and progress in strengthening EU – NATO cooperation need to be highlighted. Over past 18 months, the idea and understanding that Europe should contribute more to ensure its own security and defence has reached a new level of discussion. In the framework of the EU common security and defence policy we are preparing for launch of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). On 13 November 2017, Estonia and other EU Member States interested in closer cooperation will sign a letter of intent for joining PESCO. There are also many other defence policy elements where it is needed to reach basic decisions by the end of this year, such as the joint funding of the EU operations, battle groups and the industrial development programme of the EU defence sector. Cyber security and coping with the cyber threats must also remain in the EU agenda, this initiative came from the first EU defence minister's level cyber exercise where the NATO Secretary General also took part. This is a good example of the EU and the NATO cooperation that is developed in broad variety of fields such as strategic communication, hybrid threats, cyber security, capabilities, etc. For the Baltic States close and mutual complimentary relations between the EU and the NATO are crucial.

Security situation in the Baltic Sea Region and in Europe as whole needs continued attention. NATO allies and deterrence stands must be credible, defence stands must be flexible and countries should consistently work to develop it. In July 2018, the NATO Summit will take place under the keyword “cohesion”. This means that the decisions agreed in Wales, Warsaw and Brussel Summits must be logically connected and developed further. There are no doubts that the NATO and Russia politics should be discussed. Recent activities by Russia from the Arctic's to the Mediterranean and military exercise “Zapad”, which was bigger, broader and less transparent than Russia has publicly claimed, questions the real objectives of Russia. Every country has a right

to develop national defence. However, international society expects Russia to respect the provisions and principles of the Vienna documents to avoid possible misinterpretation on the nature and objectives of the activities. Estonia highly appreciates the contribution of the allies for the Eastern flank of NATO and presence in all three Baltic States, this is a crucial part of strengthening general defence and deterrence of the NATO. In addition to participation in common activities and operations Estonia and since 2018 also Latvia and Lithuania will contribute at least 2% of GDP on common security. This step shows commitment to contribute to the function of the alliance and the common burden sharing. Security of the region crucially needs the transatlantic relationships and close cooperation between the Baltic and Nordic countries. The gaps and capabilities need to be identified and filled in. During year 2017 Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have cooperated closely under the leadership of Latvia as the leader country in defence sector on the question of extending presence of allied forces. The Baltic States together with the U.S. have extended cooperation format in border management and organised crime.

Although Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been members of the EU for already a decade the process of synchronization of energy grids with Europe is not yet accomplished. This process is time consuming and complicated. The Baltic States have taken important steps towards development of the Baltic regional gas market on the basis of the road map from December 2016. Therefore, it is important to continue at a steady base to develop the regional gas market by 2020. After the completion of the Baltic connector gas pipeline, Finland will be able to join common regional gas market in 2020.

Another issue that needs to be highlighted is synchronization of the Baltic power systems with frequency of continental Europe. Options for solving the issue of synchronization includes one or two-line corridors between Lithuania and Poland. Estonia has expressed a position that synchronization can only take place by two-line corridors. Involved parts have initiated technical analysis to find the most cost-efficient solution from the point of view of consumers. It is expected to receive the results of analysis by spring 2018. After the analysis governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will be able to agree on principles of synchronisation. If the prescribed time

line will be followed, the actual synchronisation could take place between 2025 and 2030. However, it is possible only if the political agreement is reached in 2018.

During 2017, the Baltic States have taken great steps in development of Rail Baltica project. Trilateral Agreement about development of Rail Baltica project signed in January 2017 has been ratified by parliaments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and entered into force on 24 October 2017. This agreement is an important landmark on road towards implementation of a transport project, which is so important for the Region. All three parliaments of the Baltic States take part in discussions and adoption of state budgets for the operative implementation of the Rail Baltica. This ensures protection of common interests of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the process of railroads construction. Further activities in implementation of the Rail Baltica project should continue under signed financing agreement with Connecting Europe Facility. In cooperation between the Rail Baltica joint company and the Transport Ministries of the Baltic States. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania should continue to coordinate operations and activities for applying assistance from the next EU long-term budget with as high volume of co-financing as possible. Looking of world map with a long-term vision it can be seen that the Rail Baltica forms part of North Sea - Baltic Sea transport corridor, which connects from one side with Finland and ports of Arctic Ocean and on the other side with the Continental Europe. Therefore, the Baltic States welcome the decisions by Poland and the European Commission on reconstruction of the route of the Rail Baltica from border of Poland and Lithuania to Warsaw. It is also important to involve more closely Finland into the process of the Rail Baltica construction considering its significance both within the context of Helsinki-Tallinn and Arctic transport corridors. Estonia firmly believes that if Finland and Poland will join the circle of shareholders of the joint company of the “RB Rail” common interest of five countries in transport investments could be represented in more visible and efficient way.

The upcoming 2018, is very special for the Baltic States. Because it will mark the centenary of independent Baltic States. The organizing committees, organisations and involved ministries of celebrating the centenary celebrations of the Baltic States have worker closely to coordinate all joint events both domestically and abroad. The largest events include such events as the exhibition “Symbolism in Art of the Baltic States”,

which will be shown in Paris in 2018 and joint exhibition in largest book fare in London. These and any other cultural events give an excellent opportunity to speak about history and culture of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The year 2017 was full of activities. The best gift that the Baltic States can give to each other and to themselves is an even closer cooperation and agreements in vital sectors such as energy, transport and security matters.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee, Member of the Budget and Audit Committee, Deputy Chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Andrius Kubilius** informed that in two weeks' time the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels will be held. The EU Neighbourhood Policy is of crucial importance. Recently, it has been seen that the EU is using its instruments towards Western Balkan region and involving those countries in the EU membership negotiations. Commissioner Johannes Hahn recently announced that the EU Commission will implement the so-called "mini Marshal Plan" for the Western Balkans to give the region's economies a lift in the years to come. This means that around EUR 13 billion the EU is ready to invest into economies and structural projects of Western Balkan countries until 2020.

There are no perspectives for Eastern Partnership countries to have the EU membership soon. Lithuania proposed Europe Plan for Ukraine, which can be expanded to Moldova and Georgia. This Plan can be described as something very similar of what the EU Commission is planning to implement towards the Western Balkan countries. He asked about possibility to achieve some real results during the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit to have effective neighbourhood policy in that region.

Chair of the Cooperation Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia **H.E. Mr Sven Mikser** noted that preparation for the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit is well under way including the drafting of the Summit declaration. Three from the six EU Eastern Partnership countries are more advanced in their deliverables, have signed the Association Agreements, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, and enjoy visa free travel regime with the EU. Nevertheless, the EU is also looking forward for deepening closer cooperation with

other three Eastern Partnership countries. A new framework agreement with Armenia is prepared and the work to draft new agreement with Azerbaijan is started. The cooperation with Belarus is more complicated. Today, Ukraine is a recipient of significant EU financial support. Ukraine is the priority country for Estonia within the framework of bilateral cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries and receives EUR 2.2 million in 2017, which is approx. 20% of overall humanitarian development aid of Estonia. The EU aid for Ukraine is approx. EUR 12.8 billion. The EU should see that it supports the Ukrainian efforts in the most efficient way possible. Therefore, it could be said that the lack of funds is not the main problem. The Baltic States work to maintain the issue of Ukraine on the agenda of the EU, but the work of the absorption capacity also should be considered. H.E. Mr Sven Mikser noted that he is looking forward to hear more about initiative of Lithuanian parliamentarians towards Ukraine.

Vice Chair of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee, Member of the Saeima Foreign Affairs and Saeima European Affairs Committee **Atis Lejiņš** informed that during the meeting of the Drafting Committee of the Baltic Assembly it was agreed that the Baltic States will follow the recommendations by the analyses for desynchronization. He asked about the feasibility of the two lines between Lithuania and Poland. He asked could the Baltic States form a reserve where there are two facilities for example hydro power stations on Narva and Daugava rivers along with the existing line between the Lithuania and Poland.

Chair of the Cooperation Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia **H.E. Mr Sven Mikser** noted the special agencies and field experts located in the Baltic States will be able to advise on the best possible options for solving this issue. This issue involves not only feasibility factor but also numerous security requirements, which are essential. Desynchronization of the energy system with Russia and synchronisation with the European grid will have both economic and security implications.

Vice President, Chair of the Lithuanian delegation, Chair of the Seimas Committee on Human Rights **Valerijus Simulik** when focusing on problems with the Eastern Partnership countries Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova were singled out. As interparliamentary assembly, the Baltic Assembly cooperates with four Eastern

Partnership countries assembled in the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly. The conflict of Azerbaijan and situation related to it is understandable, but considering that there is involved also the big neighbour it could be a good idea to use the full GUAM format. The GUAM Parliamentary Assembly is the strategic partner of the Baltic Assembly and so is the Belarus.

Chair of the Cooperation Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia **H.E. Mr Sven Mikser** noted that the only reason those three countries were singled out is that they do have signed Association Agreements with the EU. Therefore, within the context of six EU partner countries and considering these criteria these three countries are most advanced. In some ways, it is very useful to treat the group of six Eastern Partnership countries together because it helps to focus on the cooperation in the region, but each of them are in unique position and they need differentiated approach. Cooperation with Azerbaijan and Armenia should be deepened in future, but situation with Belarus is more complicated. Peculiarities of situation in each of the Eastern Partnership countries sometimes make it hard to cooperate with them as a group of countries. Parliamentary cooperation between the Baltic Assembly and the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly is another useful cooperation format.

Member of the Presidium, Deputy Chair of the Latvian delegation, Member of the Saeima Social and Employment Matters Committee **Romualds Ražuks** informed that yesterday during the meeting of the Drafting Committee of the Baltic Assembly a strong statement concerning the Astravyets nuclear power plant in Belarus. The Baltic Assembly stated that there is a need for common position on this issue. He asked about the position of the Baltic Council of Ministers concerning the Astravyets nuclear power plant in Belarus.

Chair of the Cooperation Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia **H.E. Mr Sven Mikser** noted that Estonia is well aware of the concerns by Lithuania concerning safety of Astravyets nuclear power plant. One of the best options is to coordinate positions at the EU level and jointly put a pressure on Belarus to achieve full compliance with both the EU standards and international safety conventions.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **H.E. Mr Linas Linkevičius** noted that, hopefully, Lithuania will be able to continue with the works started by Estonia in the Baltic Council of Ministers and focus on the one that are important not only for Lithuania and the Baltic States but for the whole region.

In 2018, Lithuania will reach 2% of GDP for defence spending, 32% of funds will be devoted for modernisation of army, the number of troops compared with 2014 has increased threefold. This demonstrates Lithuania's approach towards national security. The Baltic States have to continue to cooperate closely. One of the aspects of closer cooperation is simplification of border crossing procedures for the NATO allied forces. The Baltic States have been constantly and effectively cooperating in prevention of hybrid threats. On 14 September 2017 in Vilnius, the Baltic States, Poland and Finland discussed cooperation concerning strategic cooperation. On the basis of this meeting 8 countries – Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Sweden, Romania, United Kingdom, Croatia and Czech Republic – have jointly addressed the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini to simplify the East StratCom Task Force by ensuring proper funding, means of analysis and legal basis. Current efforts have been insufficient.

In terms of hybrid threats, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats based in Helsinki has recently started its work and it will provide an opportunity for the Nordic and Baltic countries and Poland to make fight against hybrid threats more relevant in a wider context. This centre ensures a high level of competences and ensures proper cooperation with respective NATO organisations. Concerning the hybrid threats, strategic communications is always emphasised in discussions of the Baltic Council of Ministers. The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence is located in Riga. As part of the EU and the NATO, the Baltic States need to do a lot concerning the enhancement of the strategic communication. There is a lot to be done especially in regard to improvement of the European legal framework. Therefore, Lithuania encourages colleagues to cooperate in review of the EU Audio-visual Media Services Directive. The directive must establish mechanisms that would prevent examination of the information that threatens national security of the EU Member States. People often discuss such threats in media, but in reality, little has been done in this area.

A lot has been said concerning the energy sector. Desynchronization from Russia and synchronisation with the Continental Europe grid will remain a priority on the agenda of the Baltic Council of Ministers. Time is pressing and Russia is preparing for that. It is also possible that Russia will be ready faster than the Baltic States, for that reason the decision needs to be taken in the end of winter latest. The research centres have already presented their analysis concerning which synchronisation is the most preferable for the Baltic States. However, the Baltic States should be ready to make a decision as soon as possible. The situation with the Astravyets nuclear power plant is important for entire region. Astravyets nuclear power plant represents a precedent. This project is being developed in violation of international nuclear safety and environmental standards. The project has been developed since 2009 with a help of Russia. Clear stands need to be taken in regard to the Astravyets nuclear power plant project.

A lot has been also said concerning the Eastern Partnership countries. All these countries have been looking forward to achieve their goal and they face different challenges. Ukraine is involved in conflict, part of territory of Georgia is occupied, Moldova is also facing domestic issues. Therefore, it is not easy to forecast how the situation will develop for each of Eastern Partnership countries. However, in any case it is important to take a common approach concerning the Eastern Partnership countries and involve all of them. The Baltic States are best positioned to understand developments, which are taking place in these countries, because the Baltic States have the experience. It is the duty of the Baltic States to help Eastern Partnership countries and no matter how ambitious are their projects the Baltic States need to provide their support. The upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels will be very important. The common position of the Baltic States concerning the multiannual financial framework will be also very important especially in regard to next financial period and developments taking place after the Brexit. It is important for the Baltic States to receive funding for the essential projects. The next EU budget will reflect on the new challenges such as migration and security. However, it will not mean that the goals of traditional policies and Union treaties have already been achieved. A lot of efforts will have to be taken in regard to cohesion policy and common cultural policy. Such projects as Rail Baltica and Via Baltica must be funded in the future.

In 2018, Lithuania will take over presidency in the Baltic Council. Main cooperation priorities will include simplification of the procedures of the NATO allied forces across the Baltic Region, more effective EU border management, cooperate in cyber security sector, regional electricity and gas market, nuclear safety and achieving of joint Baltic position on the next multiannual financial perspective for the next financial period.

Vice Chair of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee, Member of the Saeima Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention Committee **Veiko Špolītis** noted that the word “multilateralism” was reiterated in the speech of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania. This word “multilateralism” currently is very important in the world and in the context of the Baltic States.

The Baltic Assembly for already many years has been highlighting the issue of joint procurements and in this area, the Baltic States have achieved a lot. However, many experts indicate one problem. Since the all Baltic States have achieved 2% of GDP for defence expenditure, maybe, it would be reasonable to establish communications officers in all three capitals of the Baltic States to plan joint procurements together as it was some 50 years ago. This would allow to be more efficient and save a great amount of taxpayer’s money.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **H.E. Mr Linas Linkevičius** supported this idea and underlined the importance of such rational solution. The Baltic States face joint gaps and joint needs to obtain some products, which bought jointly, would cost less. Nevertheless, practically every government has its own considerations, strategy and legal basis. However, this idea could be encouraged by parliamentarians.

Member of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee, Member of the Seimas Committee on Economics and Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Virgilijus Poderys** noted that the issue of gas market for Lithuanians is very important issue. He asked if the idea of developing the Klaipeda LNG terminal as the central gas terminal is still alive.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **H.E. Mr Linas Linkevičius** informed that Lithuania plans to establish a complimentary regional infrastructure

where successful functioning of Klaipeda LNG terminal will be supplemented with other regional facilities. Klaipeda LNG terminal will continue to function and its capacities have been enhanced. Lithuania proposes to join medium sized Estonian LNG terminal with will Inčukalns gas storage facility and Klaipeda LNG terminal. This way these have such infrastructure objects could complement one another.

Klaipeda LNG terminal is successfully functioning, has already received three shipments from the U.S., and will gain greater regional importance in future.

Vice Chair of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee, Member of the Saeima Foreign Affairs and Saeima European Affairs Committee **Atis Lejiņš** noted that in the Baltic States there are three NATO multinational battlegroups. However, in the case of attack all the issues concerning mobility are not solved, because there are problems with sending troops from one battalion to another.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **H.E. Mr Linas Linkevičius** noted that experts should revise this issue. According to NATO defence plans all troops deployed in the Baltic States and Poland are mobile and need to circulate when it is necessary. If there are any bureaucratic problems with movement of troops in the region, it is the task of the Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to solve them. This issue is one of the topics that will need careful discussions when preparing for the next NATO Summit. Although, the Baltic States were quite sceptical when the new U.S. government came into office, now there is no place for scepticism because U.S. is keeping the promises and the Baltic States and Poland needs to focus on homework concerning the NATO troops (deploying and supporting). In order to have continuation of decisions adopted in NATO Wales and Warsaw Summits the Baltic States and Poland need to work on removal of bureaucracy, simplification of procedures and give more authority to military commanders.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia **H.E. Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs** underlined that the Baltic States need to join efforts in strengthening position globally. In order to achieve it strategic communication plays a crucial role considering the geopolitical situation. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania must be united, act together and speak in one voice, because otherwise the Baltic States will be vulnerable to attacks of

enemies. Presidency of Estonia was focusing of strengthening of security and defence as well as different energy and transport flagship projects. These priorities were fully in line with the interests and needs of the Baltic States.

The NATO battlegroups have arrived in the Baltic States and the Baltic States need to be good host countries and do their best to accommodate soldiers as well as facilitate movement of troops thought out region. The Baltic States should also work to strengthen Transatlantic bonds not only for the security if region, but also for the whole Europe. The U.S. is a strategic partner of the Baltic States and it is very important that the U.S. is cooperating on all political levels. This cooperation should be used at its fullest potential. Nevertheless, the Baltic States should continue to explain what the current geopolitical situation means to them and agree with the U.S. on its continued support to the Baltic States. Canada is the framework state for multinational NATO battlegroup in Latvia. The Baltic States must closely coordinate positions for the upcoming NATO summit, air patrol mission must be transformed into Baltic Areal Defence and NATO troops should be more present in the Baltic Sea, and the Baltic States must upgrade cybersecurity systems.

In the EU format, the Baltic States have very good cooperation especially in regard to security and protection. All three Baltic States have agreed to join the PESCO. Next week responsible ministers will sign the notification on the establishment of the PESCO in security and defence. PESCO will give a great contribution for better and stronger defence of the EU. Launching PESCO is a major step in reinforcing the military capabilities of EU Member States. This will complement NATO capabilities and facilitate EU-NATO practical cooperation. Common understanding of concerns is something that drives the cooperation of the Baltic States upwards. Russia is continuing its attempts to destabilize the security situation in the Region. Conflict in Ukraine has not been resolved, Minsk Agreements have not been implemented and the EU has not reason to lift the sanctions. Russia is using new hybrid attack methods, propaganda, economic pressure and cyber-attacks. Therefore, the Baltic States must cooperate through strategic communication, must strengthen media freedom and must promote the media literacy, and have dialogue with Russia.

During the Estonian Presidency in the Council of the EU, the interests of the Baltic States were well presented. While the EU is facing such challenges as the Brexit, the Baltic States must be present and united to promote their interests and ensure reciprocal treatment of the Baltic citizens in the United Kingdom after the Brexit. The United Kingdom must be fully involved in Europe's economy and foreign relations also after the Brexit. The EU is not only about the economic market but also about the values of the Union based on valuable lessons learned from history. The EU is protecting such values as human dignity, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights. Convergence is one of the key elements of the unity in the EU. For that reason, there is a need to catch up the EU average indicators as soon as possible.

The Eastern Partnership Summit is approaching fast. The Article 49 of the Treaty of the EU clearly indicates that any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the EU. Therefore, the Baltic States should assist the Eastern Partnership countries with their reforms and make sure that those countries reach the level that would allow to become not only a candidate country but also accede the EU. Nevertheless, it is upon each of those countries to choose which direction to take. No country has neither moral nor legal possibilities to preclude these countries to become the EU Member States.

Different cooperation formats of the Baltic States allow to promote regional processes especially in the transport and energy sectors. The Rail Baltica project is actively progressing. Three Baltic States have confirmed their long-term commitment to the Rail Baltica project development by ratifying the Intergovernmental Agreement in parliaments. Concerning the energy sector, a great progress has also been achieved. The market has become more active and gas supply agreements have been concluded. For that reason, it is important to continue with the development of regional gas market. Finland has decided to join the plans of the Baltic States in regard to synchronisation. The final decision concerning the synchronisation options should soon be made.

The importance of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation has increased and closer cooperation in all previous mentioned areas would be highly needed. It would be very essential to get a support from the Nordic countries to attract the investments and receive funds

from the multiannual financial framework. Latvia is also very interested to further strengthen NB8 and NB6 cooperation format.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee, Member of the Budget and Audit Committee, Deputy Chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Andrius Kubilius** noted that along with the positive developments there is also a need to speak about reality. He asked about the developments in the joint gas market. Lithuania has proposed to develop Baltic gas market, but Latvia has decided to postpone this idea. He asked to explain the decision of Latvia to postpone the issue of development of Baltic gas market.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia **H.E. Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs** noted that before agree every idea needs to be closely discussed and analysed. Some years ago, in 2010 and 2011 there were many meetings at Presidential and Prime Ministers and ministerial levels where different gas market scenarios were discussed. At that time, Latvia was supporting the idea of one regional LNG terminal, but Latvia respected the decision of the Government of Lithuania to create national LNG terminal and postpone overall discussion about regional LNG terminal. There were discussions about creation of regional terminal in Latvia, when Finland joined there was an idea to create terminal in Finland. However, due to some well-known issues it was not possible at that time. The Government of Latvia has not rejected the idea to make the Klaipeda LNG terminal a regional terminal, but the Government of Latvia has made clear that there are questions that need to be discussed at the expert's level. These questions include legal issues, legal obligations and financial issues. When answers to these questions will be prepared and presented Minister for Finances will revise them and prepare a report. After the report will be ready, it will be possible to discuss it later.

Vice Chair of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee, Member of the Saeima Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention Committee **Veiko Spolītis** informed that he supports the idea about establishing a post for communication officers in the Baltic States. A lot of work needs to be done to achieve this and, hopefully, in the next Session of the Baltic Assembly first results will be presented.

Vice Chair of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee, Member of the Saeima Foreign Affairs and Saeima European Affairs Committee **Atis Lejiņš** asked about transformation of the Baltic air space mission into common Baltic air space defence system. He asked is it possible to achieve in nearest future.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia **H.E. Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs** informed that Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Baltic States are already preparing for the next NATO Summit in July 2018 in Brussels. Due to the continuous high-level military activity by Russia in the region and analysing the overall defence posture of the Baltic States there is a necessity to initiate a serious discussion about common policy development at the NATO level on development of joint Baltic defence land and joint Baltic defence structure. It will require a lot of coordination among the Defence Ministries of the Baltic States with military experts and NATO. In the upcoming ministerial meeting in December in Brussels at NATO level, this issue will be raised.

The Baltic States are increasingly spending financial resources to upgrade defence systems, but at national level, it is still not enough, because the Baltic States need collective assistance in air defence.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **H.E. Mr Linas Linkevičius** noted that air policing should be transformed into air defence. Lithuania is not planning to purchase jets in near future, but the air defence should be ensured.

Chair of the Cooperation Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **H.E. Mr Sven Mikser** noted that air policing is peacetime function, which ensures aircraft identification. However, since the Baltic States do not have their own capabilities to perform air policing, it is important to have the NATO air patrols. The Eastern neighbour practices doctrine of denial and anti-access area denial capability. The geographical position of the Baltic States in the NATO is somewhat insular and it affects our allies' ability to reinforce some capabilities other that are already in the region. The situation in the Baltic region should be seen in a 3D vision and not only as land assets including also air and naval assets. Therefore, the air defence is one of the military gaps that needs to be fulfilled.

One of the possibilities is to have NATO based capabilities, it would include deployment of NATO air defence forces in the Baltic region.

Defence planning cycle is very long, usually it takes more or less 10 years. When it comes to development of capabilities, the issue of financing is very essential. If Estonia sees that Latvia and Lithuania is joining for purchase of joint procurement and decides to also join, in reality it would mean that some other previously planned military procurements or plans are delayed. There are some very positive cases in past concerning joint procurements when Estonia and Finland bought some necessary equipment and it would be good not to lose some opportunity when there exist one. Military planners and procurement specialist of the Baltic States communicate on daily basis, so there is a small necessity to deploy additional officers in capitals. The instruments are already on place.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee, Member of the Budget and Audit Committee, Deputy Chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Andrius Kubilius** informed that he was participating in the creation of the Baltic Assembly. At that time the Baltic Assembly and cooperation between the parliamentarians was very essential. Comparing that time with today, current parliamentarians should strive to do more. Some capabilities, which were present at the beginning of creation of the Baltic Assembly, have been lost. It is good to talk about cooperation and it looks good also on international area, but in reality, there are some gaps in cooperation. The Baltic States are not able to push forward some crucial projects, are losing time and capabilities. As an example, could be mentioned the inability to agree on development of nuclear power plant. The result of this was referendum in Lithuania and construction of Astravyets nuclear power plant. It is difficult to understand why the Baltic States are not able to agree on joint gas market and on synchronisation, which is postponed until 2018. Russia will use the inability of the Baltic States to agree and make its move. Parliamentarians of the Baltic States need to look for ways to improve political institutions of cooperation in order to be more active and achieve clear results.

A major issue for the Baltic States is the Eastern Partnership. The Baltic States should take responsibility for the future of the Eastern Partnership countries. Situation in

Ukraine is not easy. Therefore, the Baltic States should be more active and facilitate future developments of the Eastern Partnership policy. The regional cooperation of the Baltic States should be upgraded into more dynamic and targeted collaboration.

Vice Chair of the Education, Science and Culture Committee; Member of the Budget and Finance (Taxation) Committee **Juris Viļums** noted that he has not heard anything from the Ministers for Foreign Affairs about the issue on Catalonia. He asked ministers to make short comments about the issue on Catalonia. In each parliament of the Baltic States, there are special cooperation groups with foreign cities and countries. Maybe it would be good to establish special cooperation group with Catalonia, because these groups could provide friendly and out of the box cooperation format. In Parliament of Latvia, a Tibet support group has been established. This group has been active for several years and has provided alternative cooperation format to express friendly opinion. Establishment of Catalonia cooperation group would provide a possibility to maintain friendly relationships with Catalonia, regardless the result of its status in future.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania **H.E. Mr Linas Linkevičius** noted that it is upon parliamentarians to establish one or another friendship group. In Lithuania, there is a policy of one-direction relations such as in regard to China and this is also the issue for Spain. When Lithuania made a statement concerning the situation in Spain, Lithuania expressed support for democracy in Spain and structures that are responsible for solving the situation. Minister informed that he personally added that there is need for dialogue and dialogue with people in order to solve the situation. The idea of independent Catalonia is not new, this issue has been raised for many times in past. This situation should be solved in democratic spirit and through dialogue.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia **H.E. Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs** noted that each country has already expressed the position of government. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia has reiterated that it supports territorial integrity of Spain. Spain is an essential partner in the EU and NATO. Ministry has proposed Spain to hold dialogue in order to solve the issue of Catalonia in a very constructive manner. The internal groups in parliaments cannot be commented by ministries and cannot be

influenced. However, everyone needs to be aware that it is not an easy time for the EU and NATO. Governments need to behave responsibly towards complicated issues.

Chair of the Cooperation Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **H.E. Mr Sven Mikser** informed that Estonia supports the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Spain in the same way Lithuania and Latvia does. Internal crisis in partner and allied countries should be resolved within respective constitutional framework of those countries. Internal crisis of one EU partner country should not negatively affect the cohesion or ability to act of the whole union. The same applies also to the NATO as defence alliance.

The upcoming elections on 21 December will provide an opportunity to find a way out of the crisis. The Government of Spain in Madrid called this election and according to indications, parties from Catalan region will take part in it. It is expected that a political dialogue will be held between all parties, which could result in a solution. As President of the European Council Donald Tusk recently said that it would always be good to see the power of argument to prevail over the argument of power.

Continuation of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly Securing external borders of the European Union

Vice President of the Baltic Assembly **Jānis Vucāns** opened the first thematic session. During 2017, many discussions about securing of external borders have been held in the meetings of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee of the Baltic Assembly. Securing of external border of the EU is very important because all three Baltic States together have 2000 km long external border of the EU.

President of the Nordic Council **Britt Lundberg** informed that in 1991 when the Baltic States regained their independence, Nordic cooperation assumed a new task – to support Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The official agreement on parliamentary cooperation between the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council was signed 25 years ago on 30 May 1992 in Palanga. Last week, the Nordic Council had its Session in Helsinki. Along with other important subjects addressed in the Session, the new International Strategy of the Nordic Council was approved. In this new strategy, it is

stated that cooperation with the neighbours in the Baltic Sea, Arctic and in the EU will be prioritized. The Baltic States and the Baltic Assembly are among most important partners of the Nordic Council. President of the Baltic Assembly Aadu Must stated in the Session of the Nordic Council that such important ingredients as security issues, transport, infrastructure, energy, social prosperity and strengthening of welfare model should be included in the Baltic-Nordic cooperation. Hybrid threats and digitalisation are important issues for everyone.

President of the Nordic Council informed that in the next week she will participate the conference about climate change in Bonn. Future living conditions on Earth will be greatly influenced by how today society manages to solve complex environmental challenges. Parliamentarians play a crucial role. The Baltic Sea is the common nature heritage of the Baltic and Nordic countries and a valuable resource for coastal population as well as important transport corridor. Unfortunately, it is among the most polluted seas in the world. Joint action within the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) has provided a possibility to improve the ecological status of the Baltic Sea. However, the efforts need to be increased in order to reach the goal – good ecological status of the Baltic Sea within the next five years.

The Nordic cooperation has been important in meeting with unpredictable Russia. This also contributes to a strong Europe that stands up for its values. The Nordic Council will strive to ensure that democracy, rule of law, equality and human rights are always high on the international agenda. Together with the Baltic Assembly and other friends, the Nordic Council feels confident that this task will be maintained.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee of the Baltic Assembly, Deputy Chair of the Committee on the European Affairs of the Seimas **Andrius Kubilius** noted that he hopes to see in future Baltic-Nordic Assembly. Within the Baltic Assembly, the issue of securing of external border of the EU has been discussed a lot. The Baltic States should not only participate in cross border activities concerning the security of borders by also ensure security of Baltic regions borders. It is always better to acknowledge the lessons learned from past and from other countries and to work on prevention than to face the problem in hurry. The Baltic Assembly has

prepared recommendations for the Baltic Council of Ministers and is looking forward to receive answers.

Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia **Evika Silīņa** noted that although the Baltic States are not one of the global hotspots that are affected by political situation in Syria, Iraq and Ukraine, the risk for illegal migration from these countries will remain high. According to FRONTEX prognoses for 2017 and 2018 risk for illegal migration and economic migrants (mainly from Vietnam, Bangladesh, India and African countries) will remain high. At equally high level will remain the risk that economic migrants from Vietnam, Bangladesh, India and African countries will try to maliciously use the asylum seekers procedures to stay in Europe. In order to minimize risk of illegal migration, effective cooperation between the Baltic States in integrated border management of the state border sector will have an important role. All three Baltic States should have shared vision concerning joint border management. This means that the Baltic States should be more active also in the EU and participate in the Mediterranean border management. The Baltic States should also continue to cooperate with Nordic partners in order to secure borders, because Baltic and Nordic countries are part of one micro region.

Currently, at the EU level increasing attention is being paid to the integrated state border management. According to the EU regulatory acts European integrated state border management is formed on 4 tier models on border management, which comprises activities in third countries such as border control at the external border, risk analysis and measures in the Schengen area and organisation of return. EU internal border management is made of eleven components, namely, border control, search and rescue operations, internal security risk analysis and analysis of threats, use of advanced technologies, etc. EU internal border management 3 horizontal elements attached - training, fundamental rights issues, development and innovation. Within the framework of Schengen evaluation mechanism, starting from 2018 additional focus will be devoted to national integrated border management. FRONTEX agency has a right to send its cooperation coordinators (communication officers) to member states. The Baltic States are in one cooperation region. FRONTEX communication coordination state will be Latvia.

The European Border and Coast Guard Regulation provides for a 3-step European integrated border management strategy. Integrated border management is shared responsibility between the EU institutions and member states. The upcoming plans include the end of the EU 2017 Strategy, Technical, operational strategy (FRONTEX responsibility) will be developed in 2018, and member states will have responsibility to develop new national strategies according to the EU and FRONTEX strategies in 2018. It has been underlined that although EU Member States work on development of national strategies, the common concerns also should be agreed upon. Integrated border management of the Baltic border is based on common principles that have been prescribed in the EU legislation. Integrated border management in Latvia is implemented on the basis of the document approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2013 - the Concept of Integrated Management of the State Border of the Republic of Latvia for 2013-2018, with 53 tasks and subtasks. In 2018, Schengen evaluation is planned in all the Baltic States (Latvia – March and April, Estonia – September and October, Lithuania – October and November). Good examples of cooperation between the Baltic States in regional context include cooperation between State border authorized representatives, within the framework of EU Commission’s project The Baltic Information Exchange Mechanism (BSIEG), EUROSUR - the use of the information exchange platform in the Baltic States in the context of the prevention of illegal migration, within the format of joint operations organised between the Baltic States to acknowledge the risks of illegal migration, joint patronage on internal Schengen borders, contact point Meitene-Kalviai ensures information exchange between Latvia and Lithuania law enforcement authorities, cooperation in cross border crime prevention has facilitated the detection of several criminal offenses related to the illegal transfer of persons, cooperation between Baltic States border guard training institutions has provided exchange of lectures, students and joint researches.

Within the legal documents of the EU there are clear “rules of the game” concerning the integrated border guard management. Security of the Baltic States borders is threatened by the same risks. Therefore, the Baltic States should continue their cooperation using and developing already existing platforms of EUROSUR and BSIEG. Despite successful cooperation at strategical level, the Baltic States should continue to develop law enforcement cooperation at the operational and tactical level, adding particular focus on joint operation, joint training and exchange of information.

In order to improve cooperation in integrated border management at regional level of the Baltic States, Latvia suggests to develop contact points in each country to cooperate on issues concerned with development and realisation of national integrated border management and to define and agree upon chapters of integrated border management important for all Baltic States (regional approach).

Vice Chair of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee, Member of the Saeima Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention Committee **Veiko Spolītis** asked about the joint cooperation aside from cooperation in the FRONTEX. In the Schengen area there are no borders, but member states do not have common migration policies. Since 2015, the wave of migration began and the power of FRONTEX is no more enough. He asked about the new strategy of integrated border management, the changes or novelty it has brought and its funding.

Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia **Evika Silīņa** informed that there are already several focal points on the EU border. Latvia together with Lithuania is organising patrols and contact points of joint activities, previously Latvia has also worked with Estonia. The issue is about joint patrolling on internal borders of the Baltic States, namely joint patrolling on Latvia and Lithuania border and joint patrolling on Latvia and Estonia border.

The Baltic States and other EU countries are contributing to the International Defence Fund, where different technologies can be bought. EUROSUR is also partly funded by the International Defence Fund. However, such activities as cleaning of border line, building of some security line and salaries for people who works on borderline are funded from Latvian national budget.

Vice Chair of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee, Member of the Saeima Foreign Affairs and Saeima European Affairs Committee **Atis Lejiņš** noted that in the Baltic States there is regional cooperation policy and certain national aspect. The Baltic States also have a good cooperation with Poland including the issue of Vietnamese migrants, where due to good cooperation it was possible to stop the wave of immigration and send these Vietnamese migrants back to Vietnam.

Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia **Evika Silīņa** informed that Latvia has a good operational cooperation with border guards from Lithuania, Estonia and Poland. According to the new document that established different approach for FRONTEX, there will be integrated border management strategy for all Europe, different strategy by the FRONTEX and national strategies, which will provide information about management and usage of surveillance systems. The new strategy is a more political document providing the concept of joint work for securing borders. The main idea of today's presentation was to inform that the Baltic States should start to think "regionally".

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee, Member of the Budget and Audit Committee, Deputy Chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Andrius Kubilius** asked to elaborate more about the tendencies on the borders of the Baltic States. He asked about the current and future challenges for the Baltic States concerning the safety of borders. He raised the issue of physical border protection and asked whether there are any particular standards in the EU about building of fences on the external borders. He asked whether there are any calculations about the funding needed to reach the preferred security level on the external borders.

Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia **Evika Silīņa** informed that the issue of Vietnamese migrants was the tendency in 2016. According to FRONTEX research the Latvian-Russian border is placed in the second place of rating by having the highest pressure from the Eastern flank. The first place was given to Ukraine. It is hard to foresee the future tendencies, but due to unstable situation in conflict areas, migration will continue to be high on the agenda of the EU Member States. Latvia is not the target country for asylum seekers, the Baltic States are mainly transit countries. The Baltic States are more involved in issues concerned with illegal and cross border crimes, with such products as cigarettes, alcohol and illegal fuel from Belarus or Russia. It is also possible that in future border guards of the Baltic States will need to deal with security issues due to Russian military operations being held relatively close as in the situation with "Zapad" military operations.

There are no standards concerning the funding for building or securing of external borders. This issue is related with each countries budget and strategy. Moreover, securing of external borders is closely related with particularities of each particular border. On the border of Latvia-Belarus there are some dump places on which it is not possible to build a wall. For that reason, it is very important that border guards have special surveillance system therefore being able to quickly reach or receive information. This system would allow border guards to react more rapidly. Protection of borders depends not only on the fence that is placed on the ground, but on people that are able to react and on the number of those persons. Some time ago there was a situation on the border of Austria-Hungary. Despite the wall separating two countries and the great funds invested in the building of the wall, its main task was not achieved without the border guards positioned in right places. Without people working in the right places and operational information no fence will provide the best protection for the Baltic States.

Vice President, Chair of the Latvian delegation, Chair of the Saeima Budget and Finance (Taxation) Committee **Jānis Vucāns** informed that few years ago the Baltic Assembly supported the initiative for creation of FRONTEX Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management in universities and training academies in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Spain. He asked to inform about the success of programme.

Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia **Evika Siliņa** informed that from Latvia at least one officer has been accepted in this Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management. After graduation these officers will be involved in management and strategic operations of FRONTEX. This is a great step for Latvia and the Baltic States in general, because officers from the Baltic States will also be involved in the FRONTEX operations and the voice of the Baltic States will be heard when the EU will draw its strategic policies. It is very important to be part of strategic operations.

Vice President, Chair of the Latvian delegation, Chair of the Saeima Budget and Finance (Taxation) Committee **Jānis Vucāns** informed that over the past two years in the meetings of the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly

the issue of preparation of officers for internal forces, meaning not only border guards but also other officers working in internal protection. The proposal of the Committee was to think about joint education programmes for the Baltic States. Few years ago, the Police Academy of Latvia was closed. Today, it is seen that there is not enough specialist in the field who would be able to do operative work. In Estonia this issue is solved, but this issue is still opened also for Lithuania.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee, Member of the Budget and Audit Committee, Deputy Chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Andrius Kubilius** noted that it is very essential that the Baltic States jointly are working on the issues concerned with securing of external borders. The Baltic States in future could have more common standards and joint vision in regard to border management. This could also attract EU financial assistance. Although, the Baltic States have no challenges related with migrants from Southern parts, the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly could pay more attention to this issue because the Baltic States experience indirect consequences. The EU policy papers provide interesting forecasts about demography. It was predicted that in the upcoming years the numbers for demography of Europe and Asia will remain at the same level, but numbers for Africa will grow from 1,2 billion to 4,4 billion. In the context of migration, these numbers are disturbing. If Turkey will break the agreement aimed at stopping the flow of irregular migration via Turkey to Europe, Europe will have greater challenges.

Synchronisation of the Baltic electricity networks with the European Networks

Vice President, Chair of the Lithuanian delegation, Chair of the Seimas Committee on Human Rights **Valerijus Simulik** informed that the following thematic session is about synchronisation of the Baltic electricity networks with the European networks and was initiated by members of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee and Natural Resources and Environment Committee of the Baltic Assembly. Members of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee and Natural Resources and Environment Committee submitted recommendations for the Resolution regarding electricity market and synchronisation of the Baltic electricity networks with the European networks.

The Baltic States should cooperate more closely in security, competitiveness, transparency and open Baltic energy market. The Baltic State have had intense negotiations in past and have taken steps to synchronise energy networks with Europe. On 11 September 2017, ministers responsible for energy issues in the Baltic States agreed together with Polish Energy Minister and European Commission to start a research about synchronisation. On 29 September 2017, the main network operations from Baltic States and Poland met in Warsaw to launch the study. This study should be ready latest in the beginning of 2018. In 2018, the final decision based on the research should be made and the synchronisation process should be started. He quoted press release form the Polish newspaper of 29 September 2017 “This meeting was the beginning of synchronisation process of the Baltic States with the European network. It started the study for dynamic processes. During the meeting participants agreed on composition of expert’s commission and the results of study should be delivered in Spring 2018.” According to this information, the schedule of the research has been shifted. The European Commission urges the Baltic States to move faster. The Governments of the Baltic States should present joint application to receive Connecting Europe Facility assistance. In 2018, the Baltic States should also start with tests on connecting the system. In order to desynchronise from the Russian energy network, the Baltic States need to make some investments. If the Baltic States will choose to trade energy with the Nordic countries, in long run it will bring benefits (some costs will increase, some will decrease). In 2017, Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee and Natural Resources and Environment Committee of the Baltic Assembly submitted recommendations regarding electricity market and synchronisation of the Baltic electricity networks with the European networks.

During today’s session parliamentarians should decide which synchronisation option to use based on results of research and possible options. There is need to agree on time measures for synchronisation project and ensure that all necessary measures are taken to smooth the process in term of preparation for it.

Vice-Minister, Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania **Simonas Šatūnas** informed that 2018 is a critical year to make the final decision concerning synchronisation process, because only in 2018 will provide a possibility to benefit from the EU funding. The following presentation will introduce with an optimistic, jet

achievable scenario for planning if the Baltic States will be working very effectively and will make a political decision by latest spring 2018.

Discussions about synchronisation process was started in 90's, immediately after regaining Baltic States' independence from the Soviet Union. Synchronisation with UCTE was confirmed as strategic goal for Lithuanian (2007, National Energy Strategy).

The Prime Ministers of the three Baltic States confirmed the strategic objective of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to become part of the UCTE Synchronous Area ASAP (2007, Communique) and invited Poland to become part of process. However, there has been no sufficient support and action from the part of Poland. This year is celebrated the tenth anniversary of the agreement of Prime Ministers about the importance of synchronisation project. In addition, many agreements and statements were made until 2015.

During time period from 1998-2013, seven various feasibility studies and analyses have been made. Currently, the Baltic States are in the final stage and are waiting for the eight - last feasibility study. The most important study was made in 2017 by the Joint Research Centre in EU. This study was about various aspects of the integration of the Baltic States' electricity network into the continental European network, including their synchronous operation. The Joint Research Centre in EU analysed four possible scenarios for synchronisation of the Baltic States with the continental network. This analysis included possible costs for the grid upgrade, investment costs and cost for the future generations. The possible scenarios included: 1) synchronisation by having LPL 1 + LPL 2; 2) having only LPL 1; 3) synchronisation with Nordic countries; 3) become isolated. According to the results scenario in which the Baltic States' grid is synchronised with the "CEN" via Poland (existing LPL1 and new AC line LPL2) emerges as the most cost-efficient in total EUR 900 mill. Nevertheless, further studies on the dynamic aspects of the synchronous operation of the Baltic States' electricity grid with CEN shall be conducted. Having of LPL 1 + LPL 2 would need EUR 700-800 million investments, additional costs for future generations would be only EUR 70 million, summarising in total it would cost only EUR 770-960 million compared with synchronisation with the Nordic countries, which in total would cost

EUR 1360-1410 million or the cost of becoming an isolated system that would cost EUR 1200 million. This study was assessed only by analysing what should be done in the Baltic States internally and for the investments in grid interconnections. The study has not assessed what should be additionally invested in the Continental European Network system, what additional technical dynamic requirements should be improved on the other side of the system for having synchronous operation. For that reason, in April 2017, after this study was presented group of experts discussed it, but there was not final political decision made. Therefore, the Governments of the Baltic States and representatives from Poland worked together with the European Commission. In the beginning of the September 2017, there was made a decision to start the final study on dynamic measures/ dynamic impact of the Baltic States synchronisation with the Continental European Network system. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that in this final study will participate not only experts from the Baltic States and Poland but also experts from the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E). This means that in the final process the ENTSO-E experts will be already participating and giving measures for the Baltic States that need to be implemented, so at the end it will be easier for all involved parts to start the technical synchronisation.

The Baltic States are preparing for the desynchronization and synchronisation with the Continental European Network system. At the same time, the neighbour of the Baltic States is also preparing and very fast. The Astravyets nuclear power plant in Belarus is being built (Lithuania is trying to stop the project) and in Kaliningrad Russia is building four additional gas thermal power plants (currently in Kaliningrad there is more electricity than they need and by building the additional power plants they will have twice as they actually need in peak time), and Russia is upgrading electricity lines. If Russia will fully implement their energy plans, the Baltic States will not be needed in BRELL (power system including Belarus, Russia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) system anymore. According to estimations, Russia will finish all works on the electricity systems in 2020. The only Astravyets nuclear power plant in Belarus could be built later. The goal of the Baltic States is to desynchronise sooner than the Russia will disconnect the Baltic States from its system.

Transmission system operator has made approximate calculations for the costs in case of desynchronization of the Baltic States from the BRELL and if there is an electricity shortage. Three days for only supply of electricity would cost the Baltic States EUR 1.3 billion and five days EUR 2.1 billion. The impact cost for all economy of the Baltic States would be greater. If there would be a shortage of electricity in case of current generation would not be ready to immediately restart after shortage it would be possible to rely on the reserves of the BRELL system in amount of 1500 MW. If the Baltic States would be synchronised with Europe, it would be possible to spare 3000 MW reserve power. Continental European Network system is more reliable and transparent system. The EU and Poland are important partners in further process of synchronisation. In EU, synchronisation with the Baltic States is included in strategic planning and it is stipulated in many documents of the EU. If the Baltic States will delay on synchronisation process it will not be possible to use funds available from the EU at fullest. In 2017, cooperation with Poland and its support increased substantially at various levels including expert level, minister's level, parliamentary level and prime ministers level.

On 9 September in Tallinn, there was a political agreement to launch final study on dynamic aspects of the synchronous operation of the Baltic States' electricity grid with the Central European Network. On 29 September, the work of study operators in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland has been launched and is supervised by the ENTSO-E. This study analyses three scenarios describing what impact would the Central European Network have in case of connection with LPN 1, with LPL 1 and LPL 2 (two connections) and with LPL and another possible connection. The outcome of the study should be delivered latest in the March 2018. The reason for it is the need to submit an application to the ENTSO-E, so they could prepare measures about what the Baltic States need to do in order to do the physical work and synchronise with the Central European Network. The process of calculation of catalogue measures takes around one year. In the situation of the Baltic States, the ENTSO-E is already involved in the process and will receive a lot of necessary information from the study already in March 2018. Therefore, the ENTSO-E will need only six additional months to prepare calculation of catalogue measures. The calculation of measures could be provided for the Baltic States around February 2019. The Baltic States will definitely need to test the mode of isolated functioning in order to collect information about how the

generation capacity is working right now and to confirm the first results of study. Due to the tight calendar, it is of utmost importance to receive results of the final study and political agreement in March 2018. The next step would be to sign Connection Agreement and apply to European final financing request until September 2018. If the tight and ambitious plan will be followed, it will be possible to do all technical work until year 2025. It is planned to organise the next meeting of ministers next week in Warsaw to discuss the progress. Another important aspect why the results of the study are important is because these results need to be sent to the European Commission and the European Commission need to put this project with provided results in the EU ten years development plan.

Vice Chair of the Natural Resources and Environment Committee, Member of the Saeima Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention Committee **Veiko Spolītis** underlined that the Baltic States must desynchronise from energy system of Russia and synchronise with the Continental European Network system. Yesterday, all delegations of the Baltic Assembly agreed that there is no need to run before the time and it is best to wait for the results of final research study. Comparing the data presented and the one provided by Ministry of Economics of Latvia about LPL 1 and LPL 2 the amounts differ in about EUR 200 mill. It is necessary to receive the results of final study to be able to foresee total amount of investments needed. He informed that comparing the amount of the investments needed, there is no great difference whether to connect with Poland or Nordic countries. It will be a political decision closely related with cost efficiency. According to estimates, LPL 1 acting alone is more expensive than together with LPL2. Therefore, the question remains about how to engage Poland. He asked whether there exists a possibility to connect with Nordic countries.

Vice-Minister, Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania **Simonas Šatūnas** informed that the estimations about the necessary investments needed to connect either with LPL 1 or by LPL 1 + LPL 2 comes neither from Riga nor Vilnius. The estimations indicated in presentation are taken from the report of Joint Research Centre, which was commissioned in April 2017. These estimations provide only costs necessary for connection and generation capacity costs that might be necessary. However, there is a need to calculate additional costs that might occur from the part of the Continental European Network. These calculations will be provided by the final study.

Transmission system operations of the Baltic States are trying hard to facilitate the writing of the study to receive it as early as possible. The first studies have already indicated that connection in isolated mode or connection with Nordic countries will cost much more than connection with LPL 1 or LPL 1 + LPL 2.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee, Member of the Budget and Audit Committee, Deputy Chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Andrius Kubilius** noted that according to technical and financial issues connection with Nordic countries seems less viable. He asked about the possible outcome of the situation in case no political decision is achieved until the preferred term in March 2018. In 2020, Russia will have energy capacity from Kaliningrad terminals and from interconnections, which will enable to disconnect the Baltic States from the BRELL system. It is also possible that at that time the Baltic States will experience great wave of blackmailing from Russia that could be used as excuse to disconnect the Baltic States, if no political decision until March 2018 will be made.

Vice-Minister, Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania **Simonas Šatūnas** informed that the upcoming study will be the eighth research about the synchronisation possibilities of the Baltic States. Nevertheless, the latest study will complement the previous study. No one knows what could happen if the joint decision by the Baltic States concerning synchronisation will not be made, but there is a need to do everything possible to achieve it and in due time. Very concrete risks are put on the table and they should be taken seriously. The political support and attention from parliaments and governments of the Baltic States is of utmost importance. In order to receive funding from the Connecting Europe Facility, the Baltic States need to submit the final application in February 2019 but the decision about application should be ready in September 2018.

Member of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee, Member of the Seimas Committee on Economics and Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Virgilijus Poderys** noted that while the Baltic States are occupied with preparation of study, the neighbour in the East is actively preparing for desynchronization of the Baltic States. This possibility is foreseen in the BRELL Agreement, according to which a country

can be locked out from the BRELL network in six months term after receiving an official note on decoupling. The Baltic States should be ready for that.

Vice-Minister, Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania **Simonas Šatūnas** informed that before connecting to the Continental European Network system, the Baltic States should try isolated regime in order to test generation capacity. The risks are known and, unfortunately, the Baltic States have lost many years to solve this issue.

Vice Chair of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee, Member of the Saeima Foreign Affairs and Saeima European Affairs Committee **Atis Lejiņš** noted that he does not understand the need for another research. He asked about the financial aspects and total amount of funding needed. Latvia supports building of two corridors. He asked about the possibility of the Baltic States becoming an island and producing the necessary energy capacity. There is a potential in the Narva station and by three power stations on Daugava river.

Vice-Minister, Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania **Simonas Šatūnas** informed that Poland is not ready to move forward with LPL 2. However, according to research by Joint European Research Centre it is enough to synchronise with the Continental European Network system via one connection LPL 1 through Poland. Synchronisation with LPL 1 would cost around EUR 900 million. This investment would be used to build additional internal power capacity in the Baltic States. Therefore, the Baltic States should test the isolated power mode to understand what is the real situation according to current capacities. The dynamic study will provide more detailed assessment of the situation. Without that study, it is impossible to move forward, because it is very necessary for the Continental European Network system and European transmission system operators. The final costs for the synchronisation depends from the amount of funding the Baltic States will receive from the Connecting European Facility, some regional projects get up to 80%, some 50%.

Member of the Presidium, Deputy Chair of the Latvian delegation, Member of the Saeima Social and Employment Matters Committee **Romualds Ražuks** asked about the interest of Poland to do its part of the work. The Baltic States have quite bad

experience with working together with the Polish counterpart. Their working speed is not as fast as it was expected.

Vice-Minister, Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania **Simonas Šatūnas** informed that LPL 1 is well functioning. The overall capacity of LPL 1 is higher than it is currently used. The synchronisation process of the Baltic States with the Continental European Network system does not depend on the work of the Polish counterpart. The European Commission is very involved and interested to implement synchronisation process. Although, the upcoming study will provide the work necessary to be implemented by Poland, it will form only a part of the work needed. Moreover, the European Commission and ENTSO-E will supervise the process.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee, Member of the Budget and Audit Committee, Deputy Chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Andrius Kubilius** underlined that it is important that the Baltic States work in a joint manner and ensure exchange of information. The Baltic States are very interested to acknowledge the most cost-efficient option for desynchronization from BRELL system and synchronisation with the Continental European Network system. For that reason, it is important to make a political decision as soon as possible.

Baltic Alliance of Apprenticeship and Work Based Learning (BAfA)

Vice President, Chair of the Latvian delegation, Chair of the Saeima Budget and Finance (Taxation) Committee **Jānis Vucāns** informed that thematic session about Baltic Alliance of Apprenticeship was initiated by members of the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly.

Chair of the Education, Science and Culture Committee, Member of the Riigikogu Cultural Affairs Committee **Krista Aru** extended appreciation to the Members of the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly. She informed that already in 2013, Declaration of Intent between the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, and the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia on the Baltic Alliance of Apprenticeship was signed. In 2015, ministries signed also

Agreement on Work Based Learning. Concerning the working places, education system in the Baltic States should be developed as a one unit. Another very important issue on the agenda the Committee is the recognition of higher education diplomas. There is need to share expenditure for very costly education equipment, such as laboratories for science studies.

Chief Expert of the Vocational Education Department of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research **Karin Ruul** informed that apprenticeships are seen as a form of study in which the student learns more at the working place than in the school/education institution. The student having an apprenticeship receives either a salary or other remuneration corresponding to compensation mechanism. Baltic Ministers for Education signed the Declaration on Baltic Alliance for Apprenticeships (BAfA) in 2015. Aims of BAfA are the following: 1) to increase the overall competitiveness of the Baltic countries' labour force by raising the status and attractiveness of Vocational Education Training (VET); 2) to encourage regional approaches in VET implementation; 3) to involve the national social partners and VET providers' organisations in BAfA activities; 4) to promote and implement work-based learning and apprenticeship type schemes. BAfA has carried out several analyses in order to facilitate the process of studies and the level education. In Estonia, the focus of analysis has been put on the issue how to eliminate the bottle necks in the VET system. The Baltic States jointly have analysed the competences needed for the mentors and created special requirements. The Baltic States have also jointly organised seminars and conferences as well as Baltic policy meetings on VET and work-based learning implementation and quality improvement. In discussions about raising the level of apprenticeship, BAfA has involved also social partners and central unions of workers. BAfA has organised a number of campaigns to inform about the apprenticeship studies. During the last years, the number of apprenticeships has increased. In Lithuania, during last 3 years number of apprentices has increased from 257 to 659, mainly in technologies and machine building. Nevertheless, some challenges have also been identified, such as keeping the right balance and synergy of apprenticeship and school-based learning, addressing mentality of employers (also VET providers) and their motivation to be engaged in apprenticeship, coordination of different efforts for apprenticeship at national level, assuring quality of apprenticeship and setting of apprenticeship monitoring scheme. In Latvia, the current number of

apprentice is 750. Within the framework of the project by European Social Fund, it has been estimated that by 2020 in Latvia will be 3100 apprenticeship trainees will conclude studies. In Latvia, the challenges include, such issues as the involvement of employers (motivation), ensuring quality, including the quality of trainers and implementation of modular programs to ensure flexibility. Currently in Estonia, the number of apprenticeship trainees is 1829 (7% from all VET students). 86% of trainees study in Estonian and 14% study in Russian. In Estonia, the most popular apprenticeship study fields are social work and counselling, mechanics and metal trades, wholesale and retail sales. Within the framework of the project by European Social Fund, it has been estimated that by 2020 in Estonia will be 7200-trained apprentices. In Estonia, the challenges include, such issues as the improvement of the quality of apprenticeship training, training of workplace based supervisors and to increase number of companies who provide apprenticeship training (majority of Estonian enterprises are small or micro-sized).

Recently, BAfA is testing new approaches to training VET and workplace tutors for Work Based Learning – Tandem studies. The ERASMUS + framework support this project. A year ago, BAfA concluded that in the Baltic States exists a lack of holistic approach to the training of trainers. Most of the activities are very short term, occasional and project based. Therefore, to increase the level of studies there is need for a comprehensive approach. Project aim is to strengthen communication and cooperation between VET schools and enterprises. Partner countries are Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Finland. Target group are the trainers from VET schools and enterprises. The objective is that training of trainers becomes a normal part of everyday teaching of apprentice's programmes. Tandem training means that trainers from both sides participate together in common training activities and creation of different examples of training modules (some modules are built up to target each group separately, some are taught jointly). The tandem training can improve competences for supervising work-based learning, ensure that pedagogical skills of workplace and VET trainers to tutor apprentices are sufficient, rise the pedagogical skills of VET teachers to guide workplace trainers, improve cooperation and communication between VET schools and enterprises, support involvement of SMEs and improve quality of work-based learning curricula. Currently, in all three Baltic States pilot programmes have been started. After the conclusion of this pilot project, the second pilot project will be

started. The second pilot project will be made considering the lessons learned from the first one. After conclusion of both pilot projects will be made a concluding report about the work, findings and suggestions. Challenges so far include such issues as the following: 1) interest of enterprises to participate in apprenticeships schemes are relatively low; 2) tandem training programmes are not well known; 3) workload of teachers and trainers is quite heavy and participation in tandem training activities can suffer because of that. For the Baltic States, it is important to improve quality of apprenticeship training and provide support for apprenticeship actors (businesses, VET providers and learners). Another important issue is the mobility of students, the aim is to use at fullest the possibilities provided by the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), which a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and (where appropriate) accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification, without quality suffering. Guided by a European-level Recommendation, ECVET relies on the description of qualifications in units of learning outcomes, on transfer, recognition and accumulation processes and on a series of complementary documents such as a Memorandum of Understanding and Learning Agreement.

Vice Chair of the Education, Science and Culture Committee, Deputy Speaker of the Seimas **Irena Šiaulienė** asked about the possible proposals that could motivate enterprises to participate in organised studies by BAfA. She asked whether there are any measures that can be introduced to contribute the participation of employers. In Lithuania, vocational education institutions were lacking behind because they were not implementing the needed upgrades such as purchase of technological equipment. Therefore, the companies needed to prepare employers themselves. In Lithuania, there were several cases when after graduation of universities, students straight away. There is a high level of needed working force. For that reason, it is important to understand why it is so difficult to engage employers in the project.

Chief Expert of the Vocational Education Department of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research **Karin Ruul** informed that the same problems exist in Estonia. Frequently, students who graduate from higher education institutions enter vocational education institutions. Recently in apprenticeship was included the field of technical training (engineers). The reason for that was because in public tenders companies need

to prove that they have many qualified employees. For example, there were tenders for technical services, but many companies could not participate due to lack of qualified electricians working for the company. Concerning the motivation for employers to participate in study programmes there are two options, such as the following: 1) to be more active and introduce in public tenders the requirement that in company should be apprentice places; 2) to stress the idea that in order to have employers' company/employer needs to contribute something. The companies must understand that they are training their own future workers.

Vice President, Chair of the Latvian delegation, Chair of the Saeima Budget and Finance (Taxation) Committee **Jānis Vucāns** asked to which level Chambers of commerce and industry in Estonia and Lithuania are involved in tandem project and other related projects. In Latvia, after the reform in vocational education Latvian Chamber of commerce and industry informed that they are willing to be responsible for the content of education and for involvement of people from industry. Latvia gave the Chamber of commerce and industry the possibility to lead expert councils. He asked whether the Chamber of commerce and industry are also involved in vocational education.

Chief Expert of the Vocational Education Department of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research **Karin Ruul** informed that in Estonia employers and employer organisations have been involved in the process of development of study curriculum. Estonia has also a project by European Social Fund, which was handed over to the organisation of employers.

Chair of the Education, Science and Culture Committee, Member of the Riigikogu Cultural Affairs Committee **Krista Aru** informed that during the last meeting of Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly it was proposed that Ministers of Culture could establish a foundation for culture in order to support all culture institutions (such as museums, etc.) and bring these culture values to people of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.

Health care and efficient use of resources allocated for the healthcare – accessibility, timeliness and quality

President of the Baltic Assembly **Aadu Must** opened the thematic session and introduced with technical remarks.

Chair of the Welfare Committee, Chair of the Riigikogu Social Affairs Committee **Helmen Kütt** noted that the working programme of the Committee in 2017 was very ambitious and had very important issues on the agenda. Among the themes discussed were such issues as the Joint Procurements of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices and Lending of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices Procurable Centrally, and Cooperation in Organ Transplantation. The Committee has also discussed such issues as support of families and demographics, rights of children of Baltic citizens living abroad, acceptance and integration of migrants. During the year of Estonian presidency in the Baltic Assembly, the Committee analysed health care strategies in the Baltic States, good customs and exchanged best practices.

Each country faces challenges in healthcare. The Baltic States are no exception, but Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania face similar challenges in healthcare. Therefore, thinking positively it is possible to turn problems into opportunities, learn from the best practices and change the existing healthcare system into more sufficient and sustainable.

On the agenda of the Baltic Assembly, healthcare appeared back in 2009. The reason was not only the increasing cross-border mobility, but also the financial crisis which lead to the need to share and pool resources. Joint Baltic projects have a significant impact on eliminating barriers among our countries in healthcare, reducing the financial cost pressure and fostering healthcare development. Our joint health care projects are already giving efficient results – due to joint procurements our countries save millions of euros, due to cooperation on organ exchange, we save lives of our people.

In 2016, Estonia and Latvia jointly bought vaccines. For Estonia, this joint procurement saved 25% and for Latvia 11% of initial funding that would be spent if acting individually. Due to joint procurement, Estonia was able to introduce new vaccines. In

2017, Latvia and Lithuania were coordinating pneumococcal vaccine for toddlers in age of less than two years. Lithuania made a proposal to Estonia to conduct a joint papilloma vaccine procurement. However, the producers were offering different vaccines and the issue of quality criteria arose.

The work that needs to be done during the upcoming Lithuanian Presidency in the Baltic Assembly is equally immense. This is why Welfare Committee has initiated even more recommendations for cooperation of the Baltic States in health care (adoption of the recommendations at the end of this Session; implementation of these recommendations will be carried out under the Lithuanian presidency in 2018): 1) with an active and targeted approach, to continue implementation of the Partnership Agreement on Joint Procurements of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices and Lending of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices Procurable Centrally, and the Declaration on Cooperation in Organ Transplantation signed by the Baltic States; 2) to urge Latvia and Lithuania to finalise and sign an agreement on cross-border cooperation in the provision of ambulance services in the Lithuanian-Latvian border area; 3) to commence negotiations on expert level about the list of possible joint procurements and lending of medical devices; 4) to start consultations on expert level about joint approaches towards producers of medicine and medical devices; 5) to commence negotiations on expert level about the list of possible joint procurements for medical supplies for hospitals; 6) to settle obstacles of logistics for exchanging organs for transplantation.

Adviser of the Health System Development Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **Kaija Kasekamp** informed that she will introduce with the healthcare reforms in Estonia to improve access, timeliness and quality. In 2015, all UN Member States agreed on Sustainable Development Goals, out of which the goal point 3.8 was to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. This goal was very important for Estonia, therefore in every policy planned in healthcare sector this point was considered. Because all people should have access to needed health services of sufficient quality and to be effective without experiencing financial hardship. Currently, Estonia has 1,3 million population and in 2016 GDP per capita was EUR 15 883. In 2015, average life expectancy for males was 73 years and for females 82 years. In 2015, average health expenditures were 6,5% from GDP and

per person EUR 1006, public expenditure was 75,5%. Since 1992, Estonia has social health insurance and insurance coverage compounds 94-96% of all population.

In all the Baltic States, the population can be described as aging and this creates many challenges for the healthcare system. This is also the issue of all Europe. Therefore, the remains a question about how to sustain a system the population is aging and it needs more healthcare services. Particular problems experience countries, which have heavy reliance on social tax. Because if one relies on the payroll tax and the number of people contributing to social insurance scheme, it means that funds for the healthcare services decrease. This has led the Baltic States performing as one of the weakest in the EU survey statistics on income and living conditions. According to this survey, great part of population in the Baltic States does not have an access to healthcare services due to high costs, distance and long waiting times. Compared to Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania is performing quite well. According to the data by World Health Organisation, spending of the Baltic States in healthcare system is still below the EU trend line (compared with other EU Member States).

In order to facilitate the situation in the healthcare system the Government of Estonia made several significant reforms. The government decided to expand the revenue base for the national insurance with a state budget transfer calculated on pensions. A transition is planned to happen in next 4 years starting from 7% of average pension in 2018 and achieving 13% in 2022. The scheme is not imposed as an additional tax on pensions, but a state transfer, which is calculated on the actual amount of pensions, paid for the non-working pensioners every month. The contribution scheme calculated on pensions ensures the necessary stability and is in accordance with the raising costs due to aging population. When introducing this model, Lithuania was used as an example country. Together with the decision to expand national health insurance revenue base, some services previously paid from the state budget will be made as a responsibility for national health insurance (ambulance care, support for national transplantation centre, adult dental care benefit (newly reintroduced in 2017), etc.). The aim of the change was to make the healthcare system more efficient by reducing fragmentation. With additional funds, Estonia could improve joint responsibility over community health outcomes, planning preventive activities as well as ensuring optimal patient pathway. With additional funds, Estonia can build strong healthcare system,

which would put the patients and their needs in the centre. In order to improve access to needed health services of sufficient quality there is need to ensure sustainability of healthcare workforce, strong primary system and sustainable hospital network. It is important to develop a model for integrated services on county level, which would take into account the health needs of the local people. Therefore, the current system needs a review and the current financing model needed adjustments to better support care integration.

Currently, the average age of physician in the Baltic States in 2015 was around 52 years, average age of nurses was around 48 years and average age of dentists was 48. In future, the Baltic States will have challenges to ensure the availability of doctors, medical nurses and other healthcare specialist. In Estonia, the average age of physicians is 56 years. For that reason, in the upcoming year's particular focus will be put on facilitating the choice of students to choose this profession. In 2016, the Baltic States engaged in Baltic Policy Dialogue on possibilities to strengthen primary healthcare. It is a yearly collaboration, which is supported by the World Health Organisation. Each year, Ministries for Health in the Baltic States agree on the topic to be discussed.

Another challenge is to improve IT-systems to support care coordination. All these policies need to be supported by financial incentives and good IT systems.

Around 7,4% of income are spent for out of pocket payments for health services. According to recent study in Estonia, 4,4% of Estonian households are at risk of poverty after out of pocket payments for health services. These very poor households are spending 1 in every EUR 12 on out of pocket payments for healthcare. For that reason, it has been decided to introduce four steps to improve this situation. First policy goal is to expand insurance coverage. For that reason, a study will be made in order to understand whether people have insurance. This study will be ready in 2018. Hopefully, this analysis will provide possible policy solutions to expand the coverage of the non-covered population (without insurance) and to expand coverage for population whose coverage of insurance is unstable. Second policy goal is to reduce out-of-pocket payments. In order to implement it, Estonia has introduced adult dental care benefit and is planning to reduce out of pocket payments for pharmaceuticals.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee, Member of the Budget and Audit Committee, Deputy Chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Andrius Kubilius** noted that although the GDP per capita is increasing in the Baltic States, the spending in the healthcare system is still in modest regime. The problem in the Baltic States is that the budget is compound from the tax revenues and from this common budget, each sector receives certain percentage of funds. He asked whether it is possible to compare the healthcare sector with Ireland (based on the presentation).

Adviser of the Health System Development Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **Kaija Kasekamp** informed that the graph previously presented public spending on health. Concerning the spending in Ireland, it can be that people have a lot of out of pocket expenditure. Nevertheless, the problem in Ireland is that they do not have centralised primary health care system. Ireland is planning to introduce centralised health care system, but it remains a challenge. Healthcare systems country by country a very different, therefore it is difficult to compare the quality.

Member of the Presidium, Deputy Chair of the Latvian delegation, Member of the Saeima Social and Employment Matters Committee **Romualds Ražuks** noted that the presented system shows what a country can do using all three wales – mandatory state insurance, state dotation's and private voluntary insurance. Unfortunately, Latvia is far behind due to lack of political will to introduce mandatory health insurance and the current system is like the one from the Soviet times. Due to the fact that it is the pre-election year, it was possible to agree on introduction of a new law on healthcare funding, which will be including mandatory healthcare insurance in amount of 1%. He asked Ms Helmen Kütt, about the possible ways to use the Baltic Assembly in order to promote reforms in the healthcare system in all Baltic States. During the last Session of the Nordic Council, experts in healthcare informed that the Nordic countries are working to provide the same healthcare opportunities and system in all Nordic countries. The Baltic States could use the same experience and share best practices.

Chair of the Welfare Committee, Chair of the Riigikogu Social Affairs Committee **Helmen Kütt** informed that using good practices and examples from Nordic countries where healthcare and social care have been integrated, and funding for both services

are available would benefit the Baltic States. In Estonia, many of these good practices have been implemented.

Adviser of the Health System Development Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **Kaija Kasekamp** informed the Baltic States have good collaboration and each year meet to discuss the latest developments and share best practices. This cooperation is important and should be continued.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee, Member of the Budget and Audit Committee, Deputy Chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Andrius Kubilius** noted that cooperation of the Baltic States sometimes brings strange results. In Lithuania, the average salary for doctor is around EUR 1100, but when they compared their salary with the salary for doctors in Estonia, which is around EUR 2000 they were dissatisfied with their level of wages. Therefore, when the doctors in Latvia announced that they will go in strike, doctors in Lithuania wanted to follow and convene in strike.

Adviser of the Health System Development Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia **Kaija Kasekamp** informed that Estonian doctors also got informed that doctors in Latvia will join in strike. Due to similar reforms in healthcare sector, healthcare providers were very interested in the results and information about the strike in Latvia and the discussion about this issue was high on the agenda. Therefore, the cooperation between the Ministries of Health in the Baltic States also needs to be close.

Member of the Presidium, Deputy Chair of the Latvian delegation, Member of the Saeima Social and Employment Matters Committee **Romualds Ražuks** noted that the problem in Latvia is the state budget, which is considerably smaller than in Lithuania and Estonia. In Lithuania, the state budget is EUR 1 billion and EUR 500 million, but in Latvia state budget is EUR 800 million. There is a considerable budget gap between Lithuania and Latvia. Therefore, the main question for Latvia is where to find the additional resources, because in budget such amount of funds, theoretically, does not exist. For this reason, Latvia is introducing the same system as in Lithuania and Estonia – mandatory state insurance.

Welfare Committee of the Baltic Assembly should follow the development of these healthcare systems. Although, the Ministries of Health in the Baltic States have close cooperation it does not solve the main issue.

Doctors and specialist are leaving Latvia to work in foreign countries where they have higher wages. The basics salary for doctor in Latvia is EUR 859 on paper, therefore the salary for doctors is being increased by 31% to preserve the healthcare system available to anyone. Latvia is in need of positive examples in healthcare system form Lithuania and Estonia.

Remarks by foreign delegations and guests

President of the Baltic Assembly **Aadu Must** noted that the Baltic Assembly highly estimate cooperation with international partners because by acting together and pooling of forces, we become stronger. We learn from each other, we amend each other. For the Baltic Assembly participation of international partners is important.

Managing Director of the Joint Baltic American National Committee **Karl Altau** informed that member organisation of the Joint Baltic American National Committee (JBANC) are the American Latvian Association, the Estonian American National Council, and the Lithuanian American Council. The main goal of the JBANC is to help coordinate activities of daughter associations in Washington, DC with the U.S. Congress and administration and its related agencies in conjunction with issues related to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

JBANC evaluates the mission and work of the Baltic Assembly. Continued cooperation between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania remains a model for other countries and for the cooperation of JBANC in U.S. Last month, JBANC participated in the Baltic Unity Day celebration in New Jersey. It was a wonderful event and a bittersweet reminder of that there are not as many Baltic events as in the past or participants. Demographic situation in diaspora is as in the Baltic States – less favourable as to the one in past. Nevertheless, the Baltic Americans remain successful activist and the work in the U.S. as in the Baltics is often more quality than quantity. As yesterday mentioned by the President of the Baltic Assembly, the Baltic States must remain Baltic family to

maximize joint efforts. Therefore, for the greater good the Baltic States must keep unified in common transportation, energy and in other projects. Baltic unity is the key also for those living in U.S. The Baltic American unities are the biggest Baltic States defenders in the U.S. even with low resources. He stressed that the Baltic States should consider the option of providing more resources for the Baltic American unities, which add value.

Currently, the international area experiences multiple threats – conventional, military, hybrid, nuclear safety, etc. In Washington, Baltic American unities work in order to explain these threats to colleagues. JBANC works closely with U.S. Congress to increase understanding on the Baltic issues. Together with three Baltic Embassies in Washington JBANC is organising many events. As defenders of democracy the Baltic States must remain defenders of Western values and the rule of law, and to stand up for these principles at home and internationally. For that reason, JBANC fully supported the sanctions in U.S. for Russia. JBANC has been advocating the Magnitsky Act in the U.S. including expanded policy acts. Human rights violations and corruption cannot be tolerated. Individuals involved in these crimes need to be banned from traveling to or having assets in our countries. It is gratifying to see Estonia, United Kingdom and Canada to follow the approach. JBANC commends Lithuania for moving another step forward and having a Magnitsky Act, and is looking forward to see the same approach in Latvia.

*Managing Director of the Joint Baltic American National Committee **Karl Altau** was awarded Letter of Appreciation for firm engagement with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, for constantly upholding and supporting the Baltic States on way to regain independence and obtain membership in NATO, and for sharing common values, strengthening belief in freedom and better future as well as for continuous activities in support of the interests of the Baltic States.*

President of the delegation of the Netherlands, Member of the Benelux Parliament **Martijn Van Helvert** informed that relations of the Netherlands and the Baltic States goes far back and are dated even from the 16th and 17th century. Belgium and the Netherlands were in trade with Livonia, today known as the Baltic Region. 25 years ago, at the time when the Baltic States just regained their independence its political

leaders were looking for cooperation with other interparliamentary assemblies and the Nordic Council was followed by the Benelux Parliament. In 1994, the Benelux Parliament started negotiation process with the Baltic States that finally resulted adoption of Common Declaration on Parliamentary Cooperation, in which parliamentarians agreed to cooperate in developing democratic institutions and to collaborate in spheres such as foreign policy, communications, energy, market economy, environmental protection, culture, education and science. 25 years after cooperation between the Baltic States and Benelux Parliament runs smoothly. It is understandable that the Baltic Assembly adopts proactive goals in is looking for support regarding cooperation with six countries of the Eastern Partnership countries – Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus. In this respect, the Baltic Assembly addressed the Benelux Parliament with a letter regarding strategic and determined approach towards the Eastern Partnership countries. Therefore, in its letter on 20 October the Benelux Parliament supported this approach and initiative. The Benelux Parliament strongly supported the point of view of the Baltic Assembly. For that reason, there is need to bring new ideas in the debate in order to set up good cooperation mechanisms with Eastern Partnership countries. The six Eastern Partnership countries are not a homogeneous group, so far, the EU has concluded Association Agreements only with three countries of this group. This confirms the Eastern Partnership countries are not a homogeneous group. Therefore, Eastern Partnership policy needs a differentiation approach with gradual steps that are taken on case-by-case basis on several matters that deal with cooperation, such as visa free policy and economic cooperation. Being members of the national parliaments of the EU Member States, parliamentarians need to justify benefit of Eastern Partnership policies to voters. Citizens of Benelux countries closely follow up developments in countries of Eastern Europe and can ask for public referendum on this issue. In April 2016, Dutch voters rejected the EU – Ukraine free trade and Association Agreement. Although, the results of the referendum were not binding, the Dutch Government decided to take this opinion into account. The Dutch government asked the EU for additional guarantees to ensure that ratification of the Association Agreement does not lead to EU membership for Ukraine. As a result, on December 15, EU leaders meeting in Brussels agreed to issue a special statement saying Ukraine’s association agreement “does not confer on Ukraine the status of a candidate country for accession to the Union, nor does it constitute a commitment to confer such status to Ukraine in the

future.” The statement also included the pact “does not contain an obligation for the union or its member states to provide collective security guarantees or other military aid or assistance to Ukraine.”

In May 2017, the Dutch government approved ratification of the EU-Ukraine agreement.

Parliamentarians can contribute to the civil societies understanding about the Eastern Partnership countries and policies necessity. At the same time, parliamentarians need to focus on key priorities of the areas – energy, interconnectivity, youth, mobility and people-to-people contact. In future, the Benelux Parliament will continue to participate in the meetings on the Eastern Partnership to which content the Benelux countries can further contribute.

President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference **Jörgen Pettersson** noted that the Baltic Assembly, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) and the Nordic Council have had very close, intense and efficient cooperation for many years. This cooperation is based on mutual trust, reliability and friendship. Many colleagues from the Baltic Assembly are very involved in the BSPC work. President of the Baltic Assembly Mr Aadu Must, Vice President of the Baltic Assembly Mr Valerijus Simulik and Vice President of the Baltic Assembly Mr Jānis Vucāns are committed members of the BSPC Standing Committee. In 2016, when the Baltic Assembly and the BSPC were celebrating 25 anniversary of establishment both organisations had the closest collaboration. The Governments of the Baltic States provide very detailed information necessary for the work of the BSPC and implementation of recommendations, and resolutions. BSPC is proud to formulate ideas that can change the future. It is very important to have a dialogue between parliaments and governments in the whole Baltic Sea.

He invited Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia H.E. Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs to the upcoming 27th BSPC on 26-28 August 2018 in Mariehamn, Åland Islands and underline close cooperation between all parliaments and governments in the whole Baltic Sea region. In 2018, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia H.E. Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs will be the Chair of the Council of the Baltic Sea

States (CBSS). At that time, a new vision for the Baltic Sea States will be available for discussions. This new vision will be developed under the Swedish presidency in the CBSS based on the decision on CBSS ministerial meeting on 20 June 2017.

The Baltic Assembly and BSPC have common goals and similar priorities. One of the common priorities in 2017, was to find solutions in the area of education, innovation and research. During the 26th BSPC in Hamburg a number of different topics were discussed. The issues of migration and integration pose a tremendous challenge to all countries in the Baltic Sea region as well as an opportunity for these policies further development. This calls for intensive dialogue and close cooperation as well as coordinated policies between the Baltic Sea states. Therefore, the BSPC established a new Working Group that will analyse and discuss migration and integration. During the 26th BSPC, democratic participation at digital age and sustainable tourism were also discussed. Members of the BSPC are in favour of further development and improvement of democratic participation means, such as improvement of transparency, comprehensive information, government accountability and other instruments of citizen participation.

Regarding the innovative science and research, the BSPC sees necessity to intensify scientific cooperation in the Baltic Sea region concerning both quality and quantity. There is a need to increase investments in innovative science and research in order to improve conditions of Baltic Sea region in global scientific competition.

Åland Islands are particularly aware of the need for and is committed to international parliamentary cooperation due to history. Åland Islands is a great example of crisis management due to international agreements concluded around hundred years ago. Therefore, today Åland Islands have internationally guaranteed autonomy in the Baltic Sea. Åland Islands are known as 'Islands of Peace' having own parliament and government. Åland Islands also hold a position of Chair in the BSPC in 2017 until next autumn. Åland Islands presidency programme priorities include such issues as the following: 1) sustainable societies in the Baltic Sea; 2) region based on democratic values, human rights and equal opportunities for all; 3) cooperation and integration for secure and prosperous Baltic Sea region; 4) cooperation and integration on the basis of mutual understanding and best practices.

Apart from common priorities, the Baltic Assembly and the BSPC have had a common vision for more than 25 years. People want to live in free, peaceful and prosperous Baltic Sea region. This was the vision of both organisations in 1991, is the challenge today and mutual wish for tomorrow. It is more than ever important to follow the principal basis and never forget the true meaning of life, peace, love and opportunity. The BSPC aims to be an international platform for cooperation, commitment and competence in political dialogue of parliaments, governments and civil societies. Parliamentarians are responsible for the wellbeing of a country, for the wellbeing of a population and for the wellbeing of all citizens in the Baltic Sea region. Åland Islands want to have freedom, peace and cooperation on democratic foundation. Åland Islands want to inspire parliamentarians for improvements for better life with all commitment and competence. The Baltic Sea is life, love, hope and home.

Member of the Slovenian delegation, Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process **Branko Zorman** informed that the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECPP) represents a model of integration and cooperation that reflects both the common will and the will of individual countries in the region, and whose main ambition is to become the leading parliamentary organisation in South-East Europe.

Among its priority tasks, Slovenia has included further active support to the EU enlargement process and the strengthening of interaction and future development within the EU, which is also demonstrated by the motto of the Slovenian Chairmanship-in-Office, SEE4FUTURE – South-East Europe for Future. The EU enlargement, the strengthening of security, the provision of opportunities for young people, and the digital transformation of society are topics that Slovenian Chairmanship-in-Office wish to devote more attention and give more room for discussion.

In a regional context which, in addition to the migration crisis, is marked by the consequences of the conflicts near the southern and eastern borders of Europe, regional cooperation and initiatives in which both members and non-members of the EU are represented are crucial for promoting integration processes and sharing experience in many areas.

Meetings such as today's give parliamentarians from South-East Europe a possibility and an opportunity to become acquainted with the opinions of representatives of the Baltic States and share views on topics that are placed in the centre of our attention. At the same time, such meetings raise awareness of the importance of regional cooperation in South-East Europe and of the impact on strengthening political stability, economic growth, and European integration.

The strengthening of regional cooperation in Europe between members and non-members of the EU is in fact the most important task of the SEECP, which in the long term aims to create a more stable and structured partnership in the region.

The SEECP Parliamentary Assembly strongly supports regional cooperation in addressing common challenges and creating opportunities for achieving goals such as: improving regional connectivity, promoting sustainable economic development, and creating business and employment opportunities.

Parliamentarians are co-responsible for strengthening regional stability, which can only be achieved by promoting political, economic and security integration, and cooperation in the region. Slovenia remains committed to this goal and during its Chairmanship of the SEECP focuses in particular on strengthening political stability in South-East Europe.

Today's debate will help to shape new ideas and views also within the framework of the events that will be hosted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia during its Chairmanship of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly.

Report of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly about the implementation of the Estonian presidency programme and introduction to the Resolution and Final Document of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly

President of the Baltic Assembly **Aadu Must** extended appreciation to all members of the Baltic Assembly, governmental and international partners for support and openness during the Estonian presidency. Working shoulder to shoulder is very crucial factor for building of strong alliances and practical partnerships of our countries.

The Baltic States are not just linked with each other by geography and history. Special Baltic roots and persistent determination unite the Baltic nations. The Baltic States are linked by traditions, values and responsibility. The Baltic States are linked by common vision of shared future and are bound together also by common issues. No single country is able to stand up to the threats we face, or solve all the challenges, alone. It is my sincere conviction that we have solid foundation and strong commitment towards our Baltic partnership.

Although, the Baltic States are sometimes too critical in regard to Baltic cooperation. Sometimes the Baltic States choose different ways how to reach common goals. Sometimes particular situations are viewed from short-term perspective. Sometimes the Baltic States compete with each other in fields where cooperation in long-term would bring more benefits compared to competition. Sometimes the Baltic States work with different speeds in regard to implementation of projects, which have a paramount importance for the growth and prosperity of the region. Yes, and at such situations, Baltic cooperation has been doubted. Nevertheless, the Baltic idea and Baltic cooperation is above all of these doubts. In every cooperation format there will be questions on which countries will agree, there will be questions on which agreement will be never reached or will be reached after long time of negotiations. The most important for the cooperation of the Baltic States is that countries are all going in the same direction and try to overcome mutual competition and strongly cooperate on issues of Baltic relevance.

In the Baltic cooperation, Baltic Assembly and each member of the Baltic Assembly act as icebreaker. One could ask what is mean with this. The answer is simple. The Baltic Assembly brings together people from different branches, the Baltic Assembly serves as arena to start discussions, to come to negotiation table. The Baltic Assembly serves as communication channel among different stakeholders. The Baltic Assembly attaches a great importance to getting all players involved in cooperation of the Baltic States. The Baltic Assembly keeps regular and persistent attention to the implementation of Baltic partnerships in transport, energy, defence, health care etc. Therefore, in the years to come the Baltic Assembly will be like water making its way through stones of non-cooperation of the Baltic States.

Estonia has always supported Baltic cooperation, which is practical and goal-oriented. In the last years, the work of the Baltic Assembly has become very practical and result-oriented. Estonia came out with less political statements but with more practical solutions. And that is what citizens of Estonia expect. Estonia must deliver practical results of cooperation, not neatly written papers and beautiful statements. Present and future Baltic nations, our people 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. Baltic people deserve committed cooperation and practical results for a development of a strong region.

During Estonian presidency, Estonia continued initiatives started by the Latvian presidency and initiated new ones, which confidently will be continued during Lithuanian presidency. Many of our practical results needed longer time but we can bear fruits of our work today. After 7 years of hard work jointly with different stakeholders, the Baltic States managed to get benefit from joint procurement of medicaments. After 2 years of work, cooperation in regard to start-ups is developing in a positive direction. Baltic common efforts in regard to development of *RailBaltica* will be continued. After 2 years of hard work, this year finally railway companies of Estonia and Latvia will try to synchronise at least one connection (Riga – Tartu line) a day in both directions starting from 2018. The Baltic States law enforcement institutions have expanded their cooperation from simple exchange of information to joint activities to fight against organised crime and shadow economy. The Baltic States managed to promote cooperation of our border guard services for maintenance of borders and starting of joint patrols. With such achievements, the Baltic States can trust each other even more and make further steps. It is important that experience of the Baltic States and support is delivered also to Eastern Partnership countries.

Unfortunately, the Baltic States have also stark reminders that there are issues about which we have clashes and disputes. Some potential of cooperation is still untapped. The Baltic States should still look for solutions for independent and secure energy market. For that reason, the Baltic Assembly should make a pressure on governments for closer economic cooperation. The Baltic Assembly needs to strive for starting of joint military procurements and expansion of joint procurements of medicaments. The Baltic Assembly needs to continue pressure to start work on specialisation of medical

centres, joint programmes of higher and vocational education in expensive fields. This year the Baltic Assembly discovered an interesting tendency during meetings with different experts from different branches. All they are interested and willing to achieve the same level of cooperation as the Baltic States do have in the field of security and defence. It is important that the Baltic States do have the quest for cooperation from different sectors and levels.

To keep those ambitious promises and deliver results, the Baltic States need to allocate more for cooperation. The Baltic States have to keep in mind that cooperation means paying for things together - for joint projects. It is not only about signing of joint declarations. It is more about building a highway together, building a railroad together. Cooperation means sharing together, taking responsibility together. Defence, security, joint procurements, border protection is about sharing of responsibility and common political will.

The Baltic Assembly has to assume even greater responsibility. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania can keep Baltic Region safe, prosperous and developed only by acting together in the spirit of solidarity and responsibility.

President of the Baltic Assembly **Aadu Must** introduced with the draft documents, which have been submitted to the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly:

- Resolution of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly, which includes very concrete and practical recommendations in regard to - cooperation in security and defence, coordinated border management, joint military procurements of the Baltic States, strategic communication, support to the Eastern Partnership countries, cooperation in admission and integration of refugees, introduction of automatic recognition of diplomas and degrees in the Baltic States, cooperation in higher and vocational education, cooperation in health sector, economic cooperation, transport and infrastructure, synchronization of the Baltic electricity networks with European, regional gas and electricity market, Astravets nuclear power plant and Nord Stream 2. All recommendations are result-oriented and next year the Baltic Assembly will carefully follow the implementation of these recommendations by governments of the Baltic States.

- Final document of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly defines priorities for the next year under the presidency of Lithuania;
- Decision on the Amendments to the Baltic Assembly Statutes;
- Decisions on revoking of the groups, which are not active for last 15 years. Decision on the Revoking of the Regulations on Activities of the Party Groups (Factions) of the Baltic Assembly and Decision on the Revoking of the Regulations on Activities of the Women's Group of the Baltic Assembly;
- Decision on the Baltic Assembly Budget Report for 2016;
- Decision on the Baltic Assembly Budget for 2018 are connected with the funding of the Baltic Assembly;
- Decision on the Leadership of the Presidium and Committees for 2018.

Report of the Budget and Audit Committee of the Baltic Assembly

Member of the of the Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee, Chair of the Budget and Audit Committee, Member of the Riigikogu Economic Affairs Committee **Erki Savisaar** introduced with the draft documents on the Budget report for 2016 and Budget for 2018, which have been submitted for consideration to all members of the Baltic Assembly. Budget and Audit Committee assess validity and cost effectiveness of the budget jointly with the Presidium.

The draft documents no. 6 and 6 A presents a draft report on the implementation of the Budget of the Baltic Assembly for 2016. Source of Baltic Assembly budget in 2016 were the membership fees from the national parliaments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Total amount of the Budget is EUR 274,140. I would like to list basic positions of the budget:

- For the 35th Session of the Baltic Assembly and the 22nd Baltic Council EUR 37,888 were spent.
- For the meetings of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly EUR 9,804 were spent.
- For the meetings of the Budget and Audit Committees of the Baltic Assembly EUR 218 were spent.
- For cooperation of the Baltic Assembly with international partners EUR 79,037 were spent. This budgetary position consists of the following sub-positions:

firstly, international parliamentary seminars; secondly, cooperation with Baltic Council of Ministers; thirdly, cooperation with Nordic Council, Benelux Parliament, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and partners of the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly.

- For informative activities which includes maintenance of the Baltic Assembly web, production of medals, production of informative materials and organisation of the basketball tournament, EUR 5,215 were spent.
- For Baltic Assembly Prizes for Literature, the Arts and Science, and the Baltic Innovation Prize EUR 55,246 were spent.
- For Secretariat of the Baltic Assembly, EUR 71,999 were spent.
- Unplanned expenses are EUR 343.

Total expenses of the Baltic Assembly budget in 2016 were EUR 259,750.

The draft documents no.7 and 7A presents a draft budget of the Baltic Assembly for 2018. The budget of the Baltic Assembly has remained on the same level as for the last nine years. Total of the BA Budget for 2017 is EUR 274, 140. Total amount of EUR 13,544 has been transferred from the budget of the Baltic Assembly 2017. The total budget of the Baltic Assembly for 2018 is expected to amount to EUR 287,684. Budget for the next year has been planned based on the presidency programme and working plan of the Lithuanian Presidency and the main budgetary positions are the following:

- For the 37th Session of the Baltic Assembly and the 24th Baltic Council, it is planned to allocate EUR 41,500.
- For the meetings of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly, it is planned to allocate EUR 12,060.
- For the meetings of the Budget and Audit Committee of the Baltic Assembly, it is planned to allocate EUR 500.
- For international seminars, cooperation with Nordic Council, Benelux Parliament, cooperation with Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, GUAM Parliamentary Assembly and other international partners, it is planned to allocate EUR 88,087.
- For informative activities and other events, which are medals, basketball tournament, informative materials and web, it is planned to allocate EUR 13,733.

- For Baltic Assembly Prizes for Literature, the Arts and Science, and the Baltic Innovation Prize, it is planned to allocate EUR 52,056.
- For Secretariat of the Baltic Assembly, it is planned to allocate EUR 79,148.
- Total amount of unplanned expenses (changes in currency exchange rate, etc.) is EUR 600.

Vice Chair of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee, Member of the Budget and Audit Committee, Deputy Chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs **Andrius Kubilius** noted that he supports the drafted resolution and especially appreciates the included paragraph concerning the Eastern Partnership countries. Nevertheless, it would be good that the letter by Presidium of the Baltic Assembly on 10 October 2017 or the text of the letter would be included as a supplement in the Resolution of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly.

President of the Baltic Assembly **Aadu Must** informed that during yesterday's Drafting Committees meeting it was decided that adding the text of the letter would not serve any purpose, because the letter on its own is a clear and powerful document. However, it is possible to add a referent to the letter in to the Resolution of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly.

Member of the Presidium, Deputy Chair of the Latvian delegation, Member of the Saeima Social and Employment Matters Committee **Romualds Ražuks** noted that there should be other option to include the letter without ruining the structure of Resolution of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly. It is possible to ask Secretariat of the Baltic Assembly to place the letter in the internet page of the Baltic Assembly and add an internet address in Resolution of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly.

With unanimous decision, the Baltic Assembly adopted the following documents of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly with the latest amendment:

- Resolution of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- Final document of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly;
- Decision on the Amendments to the Baltic Assembly Statutes;
- Decision on the Revoking of the Regulations on Activities of the Party Groups (Factions) of the Baltic Assembly;

- Decision on the Revoking of the Regulations on Activities of the Women's Group of the Baltic Assembly;
- Decision on the Baltic Assembly Budget Report for 2016;
- Decision on the Baltic Assembly Budget for 2018;
- Decision on the Leadership of the Presidium and Committees for 2018.

Election of the President and Vice Presidents for 2018

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

- President of the Baltic Assembly: Valerijus Simulik, Lithuania
- Vice President of the Baltic Assembly: Jānis Vucāns, Latvia
- Vice President of the Baltic Assembly: Aadu Must, Estonia

Election of the Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons of the committees for 2018

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

Economics, Energy and Innovation Committee

- Virgilijus Poderys, Chair
- Atis Lejiņš, Vice Chair
- Sven Sester, Vice Chair

Education, Science and Culture Committee

- Irena Šiaulienė, Chair
- Juris Viļums, Vice Chair
- Krista Aru, Vice Chair

Natural Resources and Environment Committee

- Viktoras Rinkevičius, Chair
- Veiko Spolītis, Vice Chair
- Rainer Vakra, Vice Chair

Legal Affairs and Security Committee

- Andrius Kubilius, Chair
- Jānis Ādamsons, Vice Chair
- Urve Tiidus, Vice Chair

Welfare Committee

- Antanas Vinkus, Chair
- Imants Parādnieks, Vice Chair
- Helmen Kütt, Vice Chair

Budget and Audit Committee

- Gintaras Vaičekauskas, Chair
- Juris Viļums, Vice Chair
- Erki Savisaar, Vice Chair

Address by the newly elected President of the Baltic Assembly for 2018

Vice President of the Baltic Assembly **Valerijus Simulik** informed that Lithuania will assume the presidency in 51 days from now - on 1 January 2018. For Lithuania, presidency means not only a principle of a rotation. For Lithuania, presidency means responsibility for development of the Baltic cooperation, responsibility for oversight of implementation of adopted recommendations and responsibility for further development of the launched joint projects. Presidency is a great honour and extraordinary opportunity for our delegation, our parliament and our country.

He quoted one of the founders of the Baltic Assembly Vytautas Landsbergis who in 1992 said that the Baltic States have to consider the situation not only today but also a year hence as we seek to answer the following question: Will the three Baltic States have the strength and determination to come together, unite and form some kind of Baltic solidarity such as the Benelux? Much has changed since those times. In some periods of history, Baltic cooperation has been more active, in some periods less active. But above all, the idea of community among Baltic nations has been always strong-minded. Today, twenty-five years later, the Baltic States all together managed to fulfil

aspirations of founders of the Baltic Assembly. Jointly, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania build railways, jointly protect borders, jointly fight against organised crime, jointly purchase medicaments and coordinate joint positions within the EU. The Baltic States have learned cooperation experience from Nordic and Benelux friends, and as good students – in some cooperation areas, have even managed to overcome our teachers.

Leading principle of the Lithuanian presidency is embraced in the motto – Together, Strong and United. The aim is to ensure swift implementation of political decisions and measures that have already been agreed upon parliamentarians of the Baltic Assembly and to ensure that cooperation of the Baltic States remains on the top of political agenda both on parliamentary and governmental level. Lithuanian presidency in the Baltic Assembly will be grounded on three main priorities: 1) strategic Baltic partnership in foreign policy, security and defence; 2) regional interconnectivity, stability and development; 3) Baltic roadmap for prosperous and economically united Region.

The Baltic States need to be as united as possible, because only by acting together, it is possible to break walls, open new opportunities and ensure security and development for Baltic region. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania must act jointly to address problems and challenges of today and tomorrow. Coordination of policies, initiation of new joint partnerships, representation of common interests, sharing of experiences and close coordination of parliamentary and governmental efforts is one of the fundamental tasks of the Baltic Assembly. A lot has been already achieved but even more needs to be done. Security and defence, energy, transport and infrastructure, internal security and the control of external borders, health care and social questions, science and education are those strategically important areas where coordinated actions and committed Baltic voice are needed.

It is clear that today are very turbulent times and environment. The Baltic States still recover from the worst economic crisis of 2008. Many people still emigrate to other European countries. European societies are ageing and demography is declining. Therefore, the Baltic States implement serious reforms in education, social field, health care and other. Situation on Eastern border of the Baltic States is also complex and fragile, and societies were troubled when “Zapad” exercise was so close. Unfortunately, barbaric attacks of terrorism threaten everyday life and show that we

cannot take our free and democratic way of life for granted. The Baltic States are worried about construction of Astravets nuclear power plant which is a physical and direct threat not only to Lithuania but to the whole Europe. Lithuanian presidency programme has been developed by taking into consideration all these vulnerabilities and convulsions which Baltic region face. A key goal of Lithuanian presidency is to move forward with all existing initiatives, plans and projects aimed at security, growth and development.

Lithuanian presidency will strengthen parliamentary contribution to a safe and secure Baltic region. Cybersecurity, the fight against organised crime, intensified cooperation among border security authorities, defence and military cooperation, as well as emergency management are some of the main issues on the agenda of the Lithuanian presidency. Lithuanian presidency will also continue parliamentary work on joint transport and infrastructure projects. The Baltic Assembly will observe governmental cooperation in further development of *RailBaltica* project, regional road infrastructure, transport corridors, airport connections, ports and motorways of the sea as part of sustainable transport networks. In addition, intense focus on cooperation in the social and health care sector will be added. The well-established cooperation among the Baltic States in organ exchange for transplantation and the signed agreement on cross border emergency aid are only some examples of successful parliamentary and governmental cooperation among Baltic countries.

Within the last two years, due to the increased work of the Baltic Assembly, a remarkable progress has been achieved in implementing joint cooperation projects of the Baltic States in the field of tourism, science and research as well as the digital single market. There is a need to promote cooperation in seeking new strategic markets, harmonising the business and investment environment, being more active in regard to the smart specialisation strategy.

Therefore, the developments and representation of interests of the Baltic States in the EU and other international organisations will be closely followed. Jointly with the Nordic Council, the Benelux Parliament and the Visegrád countries, the Baltic Assembly will continue to represent interests of our countries within the European Union. Lithuanian presidency will implement active cooperation with the GUAM PA

because Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova are not only strategic partners but also our true friends. The Baltic States need to help GUAM PA countries to address the issues related with conflicts on their respective countries and try to keep the unresolved issues high on the international agenda.

During the Session, it has been repeated for several times that special ties unite Baltic nations. Šiauliai is not far from Riga and Tallinn not only geographically in kilometres but also emotionally in mutual understanding. When Lithuanians travel to Latvia and Estonia, it is not perceived as travel to foreign countries but a visit to neighbours. Baltic nations share one region. Although, Baltic people speak in different languages they share mutual understanding. The Baltic States are not afraid of mutual clashes because above all the Baltic States are united by Baltic origins and those special ties are invisible and understandable only to Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. Lithuanian presidency will continue to strengthen mutual understanding and promote growth in the benefit of Baltic people.

**Signing of the Final Document
of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly**

President of the Baltic Assembly **Aadu Must** announced that the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly is closed. National delegations were invited for signing the Final Document of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly.

Report of the 36th Session of the Baltic Assembly and 23rd Baltic Council was approved on 10 November 2017.

President of
the Baltic Assembly

Aadu Must
Republic of Estonia

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Valerijus Simulik
Republic of Lithuania

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Jānis Vucāns
Republic of Latvia

Marika Laizāne-Jurkāne
Secretary General of the Baltic Assembly

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