



## IN THE ISSUE:

- SEIMAS STARTED ITS FIFTH (AUTUMN) SESSION
- SEIMAS SETS 1 MARCH 2015 AS THE DATE OF ELECTIONS TO MUNICIPAL COUNCILS
- CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS: PEOPLE FROM ETHNIC MINORITIES IN LITHUANIA ARE FULL-FLEDGED LITHUANIAN CITIZENS
- THE COMMEMORATION OF THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF LIQUIDATION OF THE KAUNAS AND ŠIAULIAI GHETTOS

## PARLIAMENTARY BUSSINES

### SPEAKER OF THE SEIMAS LORETA GRAUŽINIENĖ CONGRATULATES MPS ON THE BEGINNING OF THE SEIMAS AUTUMN SESSION



The Speaker of the Seimas Loreta Graužinienė has congratulated Members of the Seimas on the beginning of the 5th (autumn) session that commences on 10th September. The Speaker has expressed her belief that, in the midst of its term of office, the Seimas can still do a great deal for the benefit of Lithuania and its people by focussing on the most relevant issues.

“The strained geopolitical situation requires joint efforts and concentration, dignity and responsibility from us, Members of the Seimas, since all eyes are currently on the leaders of the state. The

Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania is the representation of the Nation and we must do everything to live up to this honourable title,” said the Speaker.

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### SEIMAS STARTED ITS FIFTH (AUTUMN) SESSION WITH THE PRESENTATION OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

Seimas Speaker Loreta Graužinienė and Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius presented the work programme of the session to the parliamentarians who convened to the fifth (autumn) regular session of the Seimas on 10 September 2014.

Following the submission of the work programme, which is drawn up on the basis of the proposals of the Government, Seimas committees, political groups and Members of the Seimas, the draft work programme is deliberated at the committees and political groups of the Seimas.

The draft programme of the session contains 708 draft legal acts (without secondary legal acts), 270 of which are proposed by the Government, 24 by Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania, and over 400 by Members of the Seimas (political groups).

While presenting the main tasks of the parliament, Loreta Graužinienė pointed to the need to adopt the laws related to the introduction of the euro (125 draft legal acts) during September and October. In addition to one of the primary tasks of the session such as approval of the state budget and municipal budgets, the budget of the State Social Insurance Fund and the budget of the Compulsory Health Insurance Fund, the Speaker of the Seimas also stressed the following: “There are two major priorities: national defence and, not forgetting our people, laws related to social exclusion. By this I mean not only laws, but also funds earmarked in the budget.”

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## **MEMBER OF THE EC RESPONSIBLE FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: LITHUANIA CAN EXPECT 70 PER CENT OF ADVANCE PAYMENT OF COMPENSATIONS**

Members of the Seimas Committees on European Affairs, Rural Affairs and Economics, and Lithuanian Minister of Agriculture, Virginija Baltraitienė, have met with Member of the European Commission responsible for Agriculture and Rural Development, Dacian Cioloş.

The objective of the meeting was to discuss the issues related to the Russian ban on the import of most agricultural and food products from Lithuania and other EU Member States, the EC actions and financial support to Member States seeking to mitigate the negative impact of the ban on Lithuania's agricultural sector, and other agricultural sector issues relevant to Lithuania.

During the meeting Mr Cioloş confirmed that Lithuania can expect up to 70 per cent of advance payment of compensations for the losses incurred due to the restrictions on the export of agricultural and food products to Russia. He stressed that the EC would target the support at the most vulnerable agricultural sectors whereas the EU and its Member States, in their turn, had to put efforts to find new markets for the sales of their agricultural and food products.

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## **COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS THAT REFUGEES WANT TO REALISE THEIR POTENTIAL AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

On 17 September 2014, the Seimas held a public hearing on the report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the Participatory Assessment of refugees' integration opportunities and challenges in Lithuania.

Welcoming the participants, Mantas Adomėnas, Deputy Chair of the Committee on Human Rights, said, "Every person who is subject to persecution has the right to seek and enjoy asylum. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international documents oblige us to provide refugees with decent living conditions and integration opportunities. The creation of a refugee-friendly society, however, remains a challenge in Lithuania."

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## **SEIMAS SETS 1 MARCH 2015 AS THE DATE OF ELECTIONS TO MUNICIPAL COUNCILS**

The Seimas adopted, according to special urgency procedure, a Resolution on Elections to Municipal Councils in 2015 (draft No XIIP-2262(2)) tabled by Loreta Graužinienė, Speaker of the Seimas. By this legal act, the Seimas, acting pursuant to Article 67(12) of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania and Article 7 of the Law on Elections to Municipal Councils, set 1 March 2015 as the date of elections to municipal councils.

The Resolution was adopted by 94 votes in favour and 2 against.

The Resolution enters into force on 1 October 2014.

## **THE SEIMAS PERMITTED RITUAL SLAUGHTER OF FARM ANIMALS**

In the plenary session, the Seimas adopted, according to urgency procedure, the amendments to the Law on Animal Welfare and Protection (Draft Law No XIIP-1898(2)), which allowed slaughtering farm animals in a slaughterhouse without prior stunning. The new amendments received 57 votes in favour, four against and eleven abstentions.

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### GEDIMINAS KIRKILAS STATES THAT LITHUANIA CONTINUES TO KEENLY SUPPORT MONTENEGRO'S INTEGRATION INTO THE EU AND NATO



“Lithuania continues to keenly support Montenegro’s bid to join the European Union (EU) and NATO. Our country clearly proved it during the Presidency of the Council of the EU. We will continue to faithfully support Montenegro by political, diplomatic, professional and other means,” said Gediminas Kirkilas, Deputy Speaker of the Seimas and Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, at the Seimas-based meeting with Duško Marković, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice of Montenegro.

On behalf of the Government of Montenegro and the Montenegrin people, Duško Marković thanked Lithuania for its continuing support to Montenegro’s integration into the EU and NATO. “Lithuania stood by Montenegro at the most difficult moments, and it strongly supported our country during the Presidency of the Council of the EU. Lithuania’s support does not come as a surprise to Montenegro, because we are interrelated with one another by similar historical fate, struggle for freedom, and aspiration to preserve our identity and statehood. Our countries share friendly relations, a lot of different interests and common European values,” said the Montenegrin Deputy Prime Minister.

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### LORETA GRAUŽINIENĖ, SPEAKER OF THE SEIMAS, THANKED OUR LATVIAN NEIGHBOURS FOR FRATERNAL FRIENDSHIP



Loreta Graužinienė, Speaker of the Seimas, took part in the festivities in Rucava, Latvia, to mark the Unity Day of the Balts, a celebration held in both countries for the 13th time. The Speaker of the Seimas said that historical experience had repeatedly related our nations — we created independent states, lost and regained our freedoms.

“The Unity Day of the Balts has become a beautiful symbol of our kinship and unity. It inspires us to celebrate Baltic roots, it brings together Lithuanian and Latvian historians, researchers, artists, and communities of cities and towns for various projects, and it encourages connecting spaces of diverse cultural activities. I sincerely thank everyone, who contributes to the development and strengthening of ties between our nations,” said the Speaker of the Seimas.

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### HEAD OF GROUP FOR INTER-PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS WITH THE KNESSET OF ISRAEL, EMANUELIS ZINGERIS: “THE SECURITY SITUATION IN ISRAEL, LITHUANIA AND UKRAINE WAS AT THE FOCUS OF THE MEETING WITH ISRAELI DELEGATION”



During the meeting of Deputy Speaker of the Seimas and Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Gediminas Kirkilas, and Head of Group for Inter-Parliamentary Relations with the Knesset of Israel, Emanuelis Zingeris and the Israeli delegation composed of Member of the Knesset Alex Miller, representatives of the Office of the Israeli Parliament, the country’s ministries, municipal, academic institutions and non-governmental organisations, etc., the situation in the Middle East and Ukraine, the global threat of terrorism as well as the relations between Israel and the EU were discussed.

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## **SPEAKER OF THE SEIMAS, LORETA GRAUŽINIENĖ: “WE MUST DIRECT EU STRUCTURAL FUNDS TO THOSE AREAS THAT WILL BRING THE GREATEST ADDED VALUE”**



Loreta Graužinienė, Speaker of the Seimas, has met with Vitor Caldeira, President of the European Court of Auditors. The meeting discussed issues related to accountability and public audit in Europe and Lithuania as well as possible changes in this area in the near future.

“The criteria for the assessment of the use of EU structural funds during the period 2014–2020 have changed. From now on, the main focus will be on directing EU structural funds to those areas that will bring the greatest added value,” said the Speaker of the Seimas.

“The European Court of Auditors has the task of helping to ensure accountability. We are reflecting on how we can improve public audit arrangements. The European Court of Auditors has to coordinate its activities with Lithuanian auditors to achieve as effective use of EU funds as possible,” said the President of the European Court of Auditors after the meeting.

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## **CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS: PEOPLE FROM ETHNIC MINORITIES IN LITHUANIA ARE FULL-FLEDGED LITHUANIAN CITIZENS**



On 26 September 2014, Leonard Talmont, Chair of the Committee on Human Rights, met with Ahmad Shahidov, Head of the Azerbaijani Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (AIDHR). The guest was interested in human rights issues in Lithuania, especially in the status of ethnic minorities.

Mr Talmont highlights that he himself comes from an ethnic minority and yet holds the post of a Chairman of the Committee on Human Rights. He also informs that the Seimas has the Lithuanian Poles' Electoral Action Political Group and that there are municipalities densely inhabited by people of other nationalities who are overwhelmingly being elected to municipal councils. The Chair of the Committee notes that the children from families of ethnic minorities have an opportunity to receive education in their native language from kindergarten to higher education.

“Which other country can offer such possibilities? This situation verifies that people from ethnic minorities in Lithuania are full-fledged Lithuanian citizens,” Mr Talmont says. Despite the positives, the Chair of the Committee also names a couple of problems, namely, the ongoing discussion on the right to write street names in both the state and ethnic minority languages in areas densely inhabited by ethnic minorities and the deliberations on the law drafted specifically on ethnic minorities. However, having listed all the debatable issues, Mr Talmont underlines that representatives of ethnic minorities have every opportunity to feel good in Lithuania.

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## EVENTS

### AT THE COMMEMORATION OF THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF LIQUIDATION OF THE KAUNAS AND ŠIAULIAI GHETTOS: “WE HAVE TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND THE HISTORY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND THE HISTORY OF LITHUANIA”



At the plenary sitting, the Seimas commemorated the 70th anniversary of liquidation of the Kaunas and Šiauliai ghettos. In her opening address, Loreta Graužinienė, Speaker of the Seimas, reminded that the 23rd of September had been marked as a remembrance day. “This day is to commemorate the Genocide of Lithuanian Jews, during which the majority of the large pre-war Jewish community in Lithuania was exterminated. The survivors are filled with inexpressible grief when recalling their mothers, fathers, children, relatives, friends, and neighbours, visualising them as they were about to meet their death,” said Loreta Graužinienė. “In summer 1944, there remained less than a thousand out of the 30 000

pre-war Kaunas Jewish population, and approximately 500 out of over 6 500 Jewish residents of Šiauliai. The number of Jews exterminated in Lithuania totalled to 200 thousand, which accounts for 90 per cent of all the then Jewish population in Lithuania,” stated the Speaker and invited to observe a minute of silence in memory of those killed.

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