

Address by Loreta Graužinienė, Speaker of the Seimas, at the Conference of the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers *Eastern Partnership from Vilnius to Riga: achievements, challenges and future prospects*

Honourable guests and colleagues,

The topic of today's conference is highly relevant. Before the debate begins, it is necessary to review what has been done in the framework of the Eastern Partnership over the years and what new challenges we are facing in the current geopolitical situation.

I would like to note that the Baltic States have made a particular effort to contribute to the successful implementation of the Eastern Partnership. Both the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the current Latvian Presidency focus on the future prospects of the Eastern Partnership at every level and on settling urgent issues and addressing encountered problems.

It is important that not only members of parliament have addressed the matter on the level of the Baltic Assembly, but we, Speakers of parliaments, too, have analysed what else might be done in the field. Looking further ahead, we see that much still needs to be done.

I have just returned from the working meeting of the Speakers of the Nordic–Baltic parliaments held in Ukraine. We met with a number of deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. We found it interesting to learn how they see the current-day challenges. People's deputies of Ukraine do not hide the fact that the situation is complicated. All political groups unanimously acknowledge that new challenges are expected towards the end of April/beginning of May; they therefore prepare accordingly. The meeting with Volodymyr Groysman, Chairperson of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, was extremely valuable. I also had a tête-à-tête meeting with Mr Oleksandr Turchynov.

I am pleased that the newly constituted Rada made a very good impression on both my colleagues and me. There are many new people in the Verkhovna Rada, whose youthful maximalism makes each and every one move forward much faster. Young parliamentarians possess far broader views. They have formed a group and are ready to draw from the experience of our countries and to lead their country towards European integration. I have also brought home a very good impression of the deputies of the Verkhovna Rada from the conversation with the chairmen of political groups and members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Hopefully, we will help a new generation of Ukrainian politicians to develop. This is what they want and expect from us. We should simply get our priorities right when providing support across all areas.

I have realised that Ukraine will make every effort to protect its state and us, too. Even so, we need to do more than we have been doing until now.

Although I have placed greater emphasis on Ukraine in my address, other Eastern Partnership countries are of equal importance. I will be interested to hear about the developments that are underway in other countries, too.

I have recently had an opportunity to meet with Andrian Candu, the newly elected President of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. He has invited us to engage in active inter-parliamentary cooperation. Moreover, the Seimas Group for Inter-Parliamentary Relations with Georgia has been working intensively and implemented quite a few joint projects.

We make progress step by step, while challenges are increasingly growing in number. Let me wish every success to the participants of the conference. I hope that having heard each other's views, you will come up with good ideas and proposals as to what else might be done within the framework of the Eastern Partnership.

Thank you.