

## **Address of Jānis Vucāns, Vice-President of the Baltic Assembly**

### **34<sup>th</sup> session of the Baltic Assembly**

*20 November 2015*

### **2015 Latvia's Presidency of the Baltic Assembly**

Dear parliamentarians of the Baltic Assembly,

My Baltic Friends,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking the Lithuanian parliament and the delegation for organising the 34<sup>th</sup> session, which enables a high-level political debate on issues of common interest. Although the presidency *torch* will be passed over to us only on 1 January next year, I would already like to praise the quality of the presidency led by our Lithuanian colleagues.

Now, let us take stock of this year's parliamentary cooperation. We have made important steps towards better cooperation such sectors as economy, security, transport and other areas. I fully agree with our motto "higher, farther, better". Having reviewed the implementation of the Baltic Assembly recommendations, we can conclude that our decisions have not just ended up in nice folders collecting dust on shelves somewhere. The decisions of the Baltic Assembly have been indeed implemented in a dedicated and responsible manner. We have had joint research projects. We are addressing international organisations in one voice - the Baltic voice. We have had common tourism marketing projects. We have been able to leave our differences behind, come together and agree on common interests and forget the internal rivalry.

Dear colleagues,

The Latvian parliament and delegation will assume the Baltic Assembly presidency with full sense of responsibility and strong regional awareness. The Latvian delegation began active preparations for the upcoming presidency and took up drafting of the presidency programme as early as this spring. Latvian delegates started with a round of meetings with stakeholders, including the Latvian prime minister, ministers, professional associations, to identify the most challenging sectors

that are currently facing internal and external risks, as well as to benefit from the opportunities offered to them. These are the sectors that require us – the Baltic countries – to consolidate our efforts and resources.

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

Dear colleagues,

The Baltic Assembly is an equal partnership between three countries, united by common interests, objectives and values. The priorities of the Latvian presidency are not only Latvia's priorities. I cannot stress this enough: these priorities belong to all of us, for they are rooted in shared world vision, common interests and objectives. Let me read them out:

- First, safe and secure Baltic region. We will make sure that our countries are safer and more engaged in strategic communication.
- Second, a united Baltic region. We will strengthen cooperation in higher education, research, culture and other areas.
- Third, open Baltic region. We will continue our efforts in building a single entrepreneurship environment across the Baltics.

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

Dear friends,

2016 is a special year for the Baltic parliamentary cooperation as we are going to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our organisation. The Baltic countries and the international environment has changed considerably over this quarter of a century. When you reach a milestone of this sort, you usually look back at the road you have walked. We all have made tremendous achievements both individually and collectively. But we have to achieve even more by 2018 when Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania will celebrate their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversaries. We must consolidate our efforts to ensure that our citizens live in a safe, open, reliable and united Baltic region. We have already proposed one of such efforts, the creation of a joint Baltic export marketing campaign targeting international markets or *the Baltic brand: 100 years of experience*. I invite you all to learn more about this initiative and to get actively involved.

Let me specifically emphasise on behalf of the Latvian delegation, the parliament that the presidency is a great honour bestowed upon Latvia. I have no doubt about the success of the presidency because I know that we can always rely on the strength of our Baltic cooperation team. The team of highly accountable, enthusiastic and dedicated committee members from the Seimas, Riigikogu and the Saeima. We have strong international partners in the Nordic Council, the Benelux Parliament, GUAM Parliamentary Assembly and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. We will be promoting cooperation together with the Baltic Council of Ministers. And I truly believe that when upon handing over the presidency to Estonia, we will take pride in our achievements. May the Baltics flourish and thrive!