



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM  
FOR DEMOCRACY

## Vilnius Declaration

International Parliamentary Meeting  
*Europe and the United States: Reaffirming Transatlantic Solidarity*  
on the occasion of the 27th anniversary of the restoration of Lithuania's Independence

12 March 2017  
Vilnius

We, the participants of the International Parliamentary meeting *Europe and the United States: Reaffirming Transatlantic Solidarity*, gathered in Vilnius on the occasion of the 27th anniversary of the restoration of Lithuania's Independence,

**recognizing** democracy as a universal ideal and a goal which is based on the common values shared by a multitude of people around the world;

**emphasizing** our common belief that duly elected parliaments embody democracy as the central institutions which express the will of people and pass laws and to which governments are accountable;

**emphasizing**, on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, our full support to the unity and common democratic and human values of the European Union in the time of challenges;

**expressing** our full support to the objectives set forth in the Warsaw Declaration establishing the Community of Democracies and its subsequent declarations and documents;

**recognizing** the common and fundamental elements vital for any genuine democracy as stated in the 2010 Warsaw Declaration, though emphasizing that democratization must be pursued bearing in mind the diversity of experience and cultural background of every country;

**noting** that the work of the Parliamentary Forum for Democracy is imperative at this time of resurging authoritarianism and tyranny in places where freedom, human rights, civil society, and democratic institutions are under assault, and that there has never been a time when the work of democrats was more urgent, or more necessary, than it is today;

**recognizing** the Act of Independence of 11 March 1990, adopted by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania, as a symbol of the victory of parliamentary democracy over the foreign authoritarian regime;

**emphasizing** the vital importance of transatlantic solidarity based on shared values and common interests in the face of newly emerging anti-democratic threats;

**emphasizing** the need for closer cooperation between Europe and the United States with a view to spreading democratic values and broadening peace across the transatlantic space;

**reaffirming** strong ties between Europe, the United States and Canada;

**stating** that in the face of new geopolitical challenges, the transatlantic solidarity is as important as ever before;

**drawing** attention to human rights violations around the globe, such as in Cuba, where the Ladies in White continue their weekly protest against political imprisonments on their way to Mass, while documented political arrests escalated to nearly 10,000 in 2016; in Iran, where courageous activists struggle to attain genuine religious and political reforms while others document the regime's harrowing human right abuses; in totalitarian China, where human rights lawyers continue to defend their countrymen, at grave personal risk, while other struggle to find openings for civil society to flourish; in Russia, where democracy-promoting organizations are marginalized or outlawed as "dangerous", only to have other governments threatened by democracy NGOs follow suit; and in Venezuela, where the Maduro regime has corrupted its once independent judiciary, side-lined the National Assembly, and imprisoned opposition leaders, and **underlining** that there has never been a time when the work of democrats has been more urgent, or more necessary, than it is today;

**note** that in 2018, five European nations – Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland – will mark the centenary anniversaries of the restoration or establishment of their statehoods, which laid the foundations for the emergence of pluralistic societies and saved the five countries from totalitarian regimes, and thus **call upon** those nations and their respective parliaments and governments to come up with a common date for commemorating their fundamental contribution to the development of democracy in Europe in the first half of the 20th century;

**call for** the continuation of the parliamentary dialogue and reinforcement of transatlantic solidarity between Europe and the United States through European and national delegations, friendship groups with the United States, the US Congress delegation to the European Union, and other bilateral friendship groups;

**call on** all democratic countries around the world to continue their effort to strengthen cooperation for the sake of democracy and help those fighting to build democracy or opposing backsliding on democracy;

**note** the need for solidarity among, first and foremost, the democracies, such as those of the Community of Democracies, as well as within civil society and opposition forces in non-democratic countries, such as Belarus, Russia and others;

**encourage** participation in the activities of the Community of Democracies by all young civil society activists and organizations promoting democratic principles;

**note** that the military aggression against Georgia and the ongoing occupation of Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia by the Russian Federation, the military occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, the unprovoked war against Ukraine waged directly and indirectly through mercenaries and terrorists by the Russian Federation, and Russia's military actions in Syria pose a serious threat to the system of international law and security and stability in the region in particular and across the entire globe as well as to the universal democratic values and human rights;

**urge** the transatlantic community to expand or maintain the sanctions against the Russian Federation until the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, including withdrawal of aggressive forces from the territory of Ukraine and return of border control, and the return of Crimea to Ukraine;

**urge** the government and law enforcement authorities of the Russian Federation to respect human rights and responsibly fulfill the international commitments, and **call for** the immediate and unconditional release of the many Ukrainian citizens, including Oleg Sentsov, Oleksandr Kolchenco, Roman Sushchenko, and Dr. Ihor Kozlovskyy, illegally detained in the Russian Federation and temporary occupied Ukrainian territories;

**urge** to stop the repressions against the indigenous people of Crimea – Crimean Tatars, and members of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People (Parliament of the Crimean Tatars);

**emphasize** the need for a new long-term strategy for the relations between the West and Ukraine; therefore, **strongly support** the initiative *A New European Plan for Ukraine* developed by the Members of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, and **invite** to build a joint coalition on that issue;

**protest** the non-consensual construction by ROSATOM of a polluting and disaster-capable nuclear power plant in Astravyets right on the EU border and close to the Lithuanian capital city of Vilnius in violation of the Convention on Nuclear Safety and the ESPOO Convention;

**call on** the government of the Republic of Belarus to move the project significantly eastwards and well away from Vilnius;

**reaffirm** our strong support to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and peaceful resolution of the Russia–Georgia conflict in full compliance with the international law, the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act; **condemn**, in this regard, the so-called elections illegally held in Georgia's region of Abkhazia on 12 March 2017, and the so-called referendum to be held in Georgia's region of South Ossetia/Tskhinvali on 9 April 2017; and **call upon** the Russian Federation to comply with the Ceasefire Agreement of 12 August 2008 and withdraw its military forces from Georgia's occupied territories;

***congratulate*** the people of Georgia and the European Union on the final realization of a visa-free regime as an important step towards Georgia's European direction, and ***welcome*** Georgia's clear and strong commitment to European and Euro-Atlantic integration;

***welcome*** the steps the government of the Republic of Moldova has taken on the path of democratic reforms, ***emphasize*** the need to make full use of the EU–Moldova Association Agreement for the benefit of the people of Moldova; and ***note***, however, that further steps are needed to strengthen the rule of law, fight corruption and proceed with further reforms;

***express concerns*** over the arrests of activists of the Belarusian democratic opposition, namely, – Vital Rymasheuski (BCD), Anatoly Liabedzka (UCP), Yuri Hubarevich (“For Freedom” Movement), Volha Kavalkova (Christian-Democratic Movement), Raman Hancharou (BCD), Aliaksander Abramovich (BSDP “Hramada”), and journalist Sergei Karalevich, as well as other participants of the peaceful protest march against the Presidential Decree No. 3 in Maladziechna (Minsk region, Belarus) on 10 March 2017, and ***call on*** the Belarusian authorities to release them immediately; otherwise, the revert by the Belarussian authorities to non-democracy may cause doubt as to whether or not the lifting of European sanctions against the regime was premature;

***declare*** that all legal mechanisms must be used for establishing effective international oversight over the investigation into the murder of the prominent leader of the Russian opposition, Boris Nemtsov, and for bringing those responsible, including the organizers and masterminds, to justice;

***welcome*** the Motion for a resolution of the Bureau and the Standing Committee of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly on *The need to shed light on the background of the murder of Boris Nemtsov*, adopted in Madrid on 10 March 2017, proposing to appoint a Rapporteur in the Parliamentary Assembly to elucidate the background of the assassination of the Russian opposition leader, Boris Nemtsov, in Moscow on 27 February 2015;

***demand*** that the Russian authorities carry out an effective investigation into the poisoning of the Russian journalist, Vladimir Kara-Murza, Jr.; ***consider*** that employment of additional European and international legal mechanisms could assist the investigations of politically motivated crimes, making this the goal for all countries concerned about protecting their security.

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The Parliamentary Forum for Democracy has adopted the following declarations, resolutions and other documents: Vilnius Declaration setting up the Community of Democracies Parliamentary Forum (2010); Resolution on the Nomination of Liu Xiaobo for the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize (2010); Resolution on the Situation in Georgia (2010); Resolution calling for support of Cuba's pro-democracy movement (2010); Final Resolution of Parliamentary Forum Krakow Meeting (2010); Resolution calling for improvement of the political and civil society situation in Belarus (2010); Resolution calling for improvement of the political situation in Ukraine (2010); Resolution calling for support of Cuba's pro-democracy movement (2010); Tbilisi Declaration (2011); Vilnius Declaration (2011); Resolution on Cuba (2011); Resolution on Elections in Thailand (Vilnius); Resolution on Freedom for Aung San Suu Kyi (Vilnius); Resolution on Yemeni People (2011); Resolution on Libyan Transitional National Council (2011); Resolution on the Situation in Belarus

(2011); Resolution on Suppression of Syrian People (2011); Resolution on Women in Strengthening Democracy (2011); Resolution on Tymoshenko (2012); Vilnius Declaration (2012); Washington Declaration (2011); Parliamentary Forum for Democracy Resolution (2013); Statement of the members of the Parliamentary Forum for Democracy on the course of the Europe Eastern Partnership Program and the hopes of Ukrainians (2013); Conclusions of the Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Foreign Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union and the Parliamentary Forum for Democracy during the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of Europe (2013); and PFD members; Statement on the Eve of an Eventual Big War in the Eastern Europe (2014); Vilnius Declaration (2015).