

Minutes of the 23rd Session of the Baltic Assembly and the 10th Baltic Council

1. Time and venue of the Session

17 – 19 December 2004, Riga (Latvia)

2. Names of the presiding officers and participants of the Session

Presiding officers of the Session:

Mr. Jānis Reirs, President of the Baltic Assembly, Head of the Latvian Delegation to the Baltic Assembly

Mr. Andres Taimla, Vice-President of the Baltic Assembly, Head of the Estonian delegation to the Baltic Assembly

Mr. Valerijus Simulik, Vice-President of the Baltic Assembly, Head of the Lithuanian delegation to the Baltic Assembly

3. Agenda of the Session

1. Mutual information exchange and co-ordination of matters among the Baltic States with regard to the EU and NATO. Co-operation in rendering assistance to and sharing reform experience with third countries;
2. Social aspects of migration.

4. Speakers and the essence of their speeches

Opening of the Session

- **H.E. Mrs. Ingrīda Ūdre**, Speaker of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia
Mrs. Ūdre emphasized that this Session is especially significant because the Baltic States have become members of the EU and NATO. She stressed that the new

international status gives the Baltic States the opportunity to participate in the decision making process as full-fledged members and to adopt the decisions which are essential for future of Europe. The new political arena has influenced the character of the trilateral co-operation of the Baltic States.

Mrs. Ūdre stressed that the role and influence of the Baltic States have increased both, in the Baltic Sea region and Europe as a whole. The Baltic States have to define long-term aims of the trilateral co-operation. Co-operation of the Baltic States is developing into a new partnership, which is based on two main fields: firstly, participation in shaping the EU policy; secondly, developing the Baltic Sea; and thirdly, promoting security and stability.

Mrs. Ūdre noted that during the EU integration process, the Baltic States have obtained unique experience regarding implementation of reforms and harmonisation on legislation. Now the Baltic States have to transfer knowledges and experience to the third countries in order to promote expansion and development of democracy and civil societies.

- **Mr. Gabriel Romanus**, President of the Nordic Council

Mr. Romanus emphasized that this year has been very significant not only for the new member states of the EU and NATO, but also for all Northern European countries. Baltic-Nordic-Benelux co-operation has a great potential by taking joint actions and formulating common positions within the EU. Furthermore, the Baltic-Nordic-Benelux countries have 20% of votes in different EU institutions. In such situation the Baltic – Benelux – Nordic co-operation will have new dimension in the EU context. By developing regional co-operation Baltic and Nordic countries can promote welfare and growth in the whole Baltic Sea region. But it is necessary to discuss content, scope and mode of Baltic – Nordic regional – co-operation.

Mr. Romanus underlined that national parliaments will have significant role in so called *subsidiarity control*, if the new EU Constitution will be adopted. Subsidiarity principle implies an important function for all parliamentarians of the EU member states, since various EU matters can be better handled on national or on regional level.

- **Mr. Jean-Marie Happart**, President of the Benelux Inter-parliamentary Consultative Council

2004 marks the 10th anniversary of the signing the Common Declaration between the Baltic Assembly and the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council. It was signed by both organisations on 18 November 1994, in order to develop closer co-operation in the time when the Baltic States integrated in the EU.

Mr. Happart shared the view about the future of the Baltic-Benelux co-operation within the EU. He noted that all European countries should give their contribution to the EU collective interests, regardless they are big or small countries. Therefore, the Benelux countries are very interested in the development of the Baltic States in this matter, especially in such sensitive area as Schengen Treaty, which distances the borders and enlarges the spaces of each country of the EU.

Report of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly

- **Mr. Jānis Reirs**, President of the Baltic Assembly, Head of the Latvian Delegation to the Baltic Assembly

In his speech, Mr. Reirs emphasized that this year has been particularly active and meaningful not only for the Baltic States and the Nordic countries but also for European countries as a whole. The largest EU enlargement has taken place, and a considerable number of new countries have joined NATO. He stressed that now when this difficult and historically complicated process has ended, the role of regional and parliamentary cooperation in the new international environment, as well as the effectiveness of this cooperation and possible models, has become of particular importance.

It is clear that the current situation requires establishing a dialogue between Northern European regional organisations and the European Union. Therefore, this year the Baltic Assembly has focused on structural and political reforms of the Baltic Assembly in order to face new challenges, which require new skills and a capacity for shaping various cooperation mechanisms. After significant and controversial discussions of the Baltic Assembly, the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly considered different ideas and proposals and reached a consensus on changing the format of the BA Session, increasing the authority and functions of the BA Presidium, reducing the

number of BA committees and changing the numerical composition of national delegations to the BA.

Mr. Reirs outlined that the Baltic States must continue developing relations with the Nordic countries because the eight sea-region countries have many common interests. He noted that the task of parliamentarians is to look to the future and develop a broad long-term policy. For this reason, the Baltic Assembly and Nordic Council established joint adhoc group on European affairs. The adhoc should identify issues where future parliamentary cooperation between Baltic Assembly and Nordic Council can provide added value in a Baltic Sea Region and wider European perspective.

In conclusion Mr. Reirs highlighted that here has been another very significant event this year – the year 2004 marks the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Common Declaration between the Baltic Assembly and the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council, which was signed by both organisations on 18 November 1994.

Greetings by the guests of the Session

- **Mr. Stef Goris**, President of the Assembly of the Western European Union

In his speech Mr. Goris introduced to the achievements of the Western European Union (WEU) and the EU Security and Defence Policy, as well as to the role of the EU in the interparliamentary debate on these matters. Currently, the WEU undergoes the reform process. In this regard a great effort is made to improve strategic transport capabilities, crisis management planning and legal framework concerning military co-operation of the Western European Union countries.

Mr. Goris expressed the view that co-operation between governments should be mirrored by co-operation between national parliaments.

Mr. Goris expressed hope that the parliamentarians from the Baltic countries will become full members of the WEU Parliamentary Assembly in the nearest future. After the EU enlargement, parliamentarians of the Baltic States now have the status of affiliate members of the WEU; therefore, the Baltic counties have the right to take part in the various activities of the WEU.

- **Ms. Petra Bläss**, Senior Consultant of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

On behalf of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Ms. Bläss addressed the Session of the Baltic Assembly. She emphasised that it is an excellent opportunity to reinforce the relations between parliamentarians of Baltic and Balkan region. She informed that the overall goal of the Parliamentary Co-operation initiative is to strengthen the democratisation processes and to increase the efficiency and transparency of governing structures and the ongoing reform processes, which will focus on 1) capacity building for legislative bodies and on 2) establishing functional networks between parliaments of South Eastern Europe.

Ms. Bläss pointed that South Eastern European parliaments should use the assistance of the Baltic Assembly – the experience of a trilateral regional cooperation as well as the cooperation with the Nordic Council and the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultant Council as an opportunity for parliamentarians of the region to come together and discuss problems and issues of common interest.

In conclusion, Ms. Bläss informed that it would be very valuable if parliamentarians of the Baltic States could participate at the Parliamentarian Conference on the implementation of the Energy Community of South Eastern Europe to be held in Skopje in Spring 2005.

Topic I:

Mutual information exchange and co-ordination of matters among the Baltic States with regard to the EU and NATO. Co-operation in rendering assistance to and sharing reform experience with third countries

- **Mr. Paulis Kļaviņš**, Chairman of the Security and Foreign Affairs Committee of the Baltic Assembly

Mr. Kļaviņš outlined that even after joining the EU and NATO, the Baltic States have to co-operate very closely because of the experience of 20th century. The Baltic States can become an item for selling due to economic or strategic reasons of some superpowers. He stressed that present situation in Byelorussia and in the Russian Federation does not represent that democratic legal systems are formally established in those countries. Furthermore, the most Russians and Byelorussians do not have

uncensored information, and imperialist ambitions of old system are still alive. Therefore, Baltic members of the European Parliament have to follow the work of the EU institutions very closely, especially when the EU is dealing with the relations with neighbours of the Union.

- **Mr. Margus Hanson**, Member of the Defence Committee of the Riigikogu, Republic of Estonia

Mr. Hanson in his report pointed out that it is difficult to overestimate the role of the fruitful co-operation of the Baltic States when integrating into the EU and NATO. The Baltic co-operation shows the successful model for regional co-operation in regard of the EU integration. As a result, the Baltic States have gradually changed from being recipients to providers of aid to third countries. The capability of the Baltic States to provide financial and material assistance to third countries is understandably rather limited. However, the Baltic States want to share experience with countries, which have expressed clear desire to join Euro Atlantic structures. Mr. Hanson noted that the Baltic States are very active in so called South Caucasus Clearinghouse, which is the round table of the states assisting to the South Caucasus countries in defence issues.

- **Mr. Eitvydas Bajarūnas**, Director of the Europe Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania

Mr. Bajarūnas emphasized that the need to co-ordinate common positions and actions of the Baltic States has even increased after joining the EU and NATO. Since the Baltic States are among the small countries of the EU and NATO, it is quite difficult to deal with huge volume of information and administrative requirements that the Baltic countries receive. For this reason, the active Baltic-Nordic-Benelux co-operation will be continued. Mr. Bajarūnas noted various trilateral and multilateral projects in which the Baltic countries are involved: 1) *NB6* (three Baltic countries and three Scandinavian countries – Sweden, Finland and Denmark); 2) *NB8* (5 Nordic countries and 3 Baltic countries); 3) format *3+1* (3 Baltic countries and Germany); 4) format *3+4* (3 Baltic countries and 4 Vishegrad countries); 5) format *3+3+4* (3 Baltic countries, 3 Nordic countries and 4 Vishegrad countries).

Co-reports

- **Mr. Saulius Pečeliūnas**, Vice-Chairman of the BA Security and Foreign Affairs Committee

Mr. Pečeliūnas highlighted two main areas of co-operation between the Baltic States concerning the EU and NATO matters: 1) co-operation between customs authorities; 2) co-operation in formulating issues about the role of customs in management of external borders.

Mr. Pečeliūnas stressed that an effective border control system of the Baltic States cannot be instituted without unified standards and legal framework. For this reason, it is necessary to facilitate common strategy for risk management in customs. Mr. Pečeliūnas pointed that there are various fiscal, trade and security risk factors in border control. The Baltic States face a lot of challenges by enforcing the EU directives in the field of Schengen Agreement. For this reason, it is necessary to apply so-called “one door” principle stipulating direct exchange of information among border control institutions.

- **Mrs. Rannveig Guðmundsdóttir**, President of the Nordic Council 2005

Mrs. Guðmundsdóttir shared the view on several high priority matters in regard with Nordic-Baltic co-operation. Firstly, the Nordic-Baltic co-operation in the new Europe has strengthened. She noted that the experiences the Baltic and Nordic countries have acquired could serve as a contribution and added value in the development of the European Union, particularly when it comes to developing ties with their neighbours. Secondly, with the aspect to the EU enlargement, the combination of the Nordic-Baltic experiences of parliamentary co-operation and the experience of dealing with Russia could be an asset in a North Europe perspective. Mrs. Guðmundsdóttir highlighted that the overriding task for the Nordic-Baltic co-operation is contribution to the bridge building between the EU and Russia as well as the Eastern neighbours.

Thirdly, it is of particular importance to draw attention to the challenges not only of the Baltic Sea region, but also to the Arctic and Barents region.

In conclusion, Mrs. Guðmundsdóttir outlined that it is of particular significance to build a coherent view of how and where the Nordic-Baltic parliamentary co-operation can provide added value to the important issues in Northern Europe.

- **Mr. Jean-Marie Happart**, President of the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council

As control of the EU borders is an essential element of the Schengen Agreement, Benelux countries are interested in the development of the Baltic States co-operation on border control matters. Mr. Happart stressed that it is of a great importance to apply the EU legal framework concerning border control, since the Baltic States holds external borders of the EU. He noted that the Baltic States should be aware that effective border control mechanism is an important step towards combating illegal migration, which turns to be one of the most urgent issues in Europe today.

Mr. Toomas Alatalu, Vice-Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee of the Baltic Assembly, noted that with the aspect of the EU enlargement, more active co-operation is needed in the field of assistance to third countries, as the Baltic States supports the new EU neighbouring policy. For this reason, the Baltic countries should facilitate the development of the Eastern dimension policy. Mr. Alatalu pointed that problem of third countries is raised, and now it is time to implement it in practice.

Mr. Paulis Kļaviņš, Chairman of the Security and Foreign Affairs Committee of the Baltic Assembly, agreed that the Baltic States must explain the history to the international society. For example, the facts about mass graves. He stressed that after joining the EU, it is our duty to tell the truth about the history of the Baltic States during the Soviet regime.

Reports of the Chairpersons of the Committees on the activities in 2004 and draft documents

- **Mr. Paulis Kļaviņš**, Chairman of the Security and Foreign Affairs Committee of the Baltic Assembly

The Security and Foreign Affairs Committee of the Baltic Assembly have discussed various security matters, and was unanimous about three main resolutions. The first was on the need to assess the damage inflicted on the Baltic States by the occupation. The second was the draft resolution regarding accusations by the State Duma of the Russian Federation. The third draft resolution made by the Committee is on the situation in Ukraine.

- **Mr. Igors Solovjovs**, Chairman of the Economic Affairs, Communications and Informatics Committee of the Baltic Assembly

This year the Economic Affairs, Communications and Informatics Committee discussed many issues, which are very topical for the Baltic States. The main priority for co-operation with the Nordic Council was energy and alternative energy sources. However, in co-operation with the BICC main focus was laid on the issues of ports. With the aspect of ports, the Baltic and Benelux parliamentarians discussed the following topics: using military airports for civil purposes, the social and economic importance of seaports and river ports, changing role of the different port partners and other. Mr. Solovjovs underlined that ports issues have to be discussed from two different aspects – economic and environmental. Speaking about the cargo shipment, parliamentarians of the Baltic and Benelux countries concluded that economic activities concerning ports and shipments have intensified sharp. Therefore, it is of particular importance to expand regional co-operation in this regard.

Mr. Solovjovs introduced to the priorities of the Committee in 2005: 1) economic development of the Baltic region; 2) development of small- and medium sized business in the EU context; 3) projects “*Via Baltica*” and “*Rail Baltica*”.

- **Mrs. Ināra Ostrovska**, Chairperson of the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly

Mrs. Ostrovska reported on the Committee activities in 2004. The main priority on the agenda of the Committee was education quality. Education quality was also the main priority in co-operation with the Culture, Education and Training Committee of the Nordic Council. The parliamentarians of the Baltic and Nordic countries were unanimous that it is necessary to increase financial support to education system in order to improve the quality of education. It is also of importance to improve communication between education institutions and the state, to develop educational programs for teachers, and to ensure life-long education possibilities for everybody. For this reason, the Committee prepared a draft resolution on co-operation between the Baltic States and Nordic countries with regard to the quality of education.

Along with the work concerning quality of education, members of the Committee discussed also minority languages and integration related matters, since the EU

determines the implementation of legal acts and principles, which facilitate the cultural diversity in society.

- **Mr. Mihails Pietkevičs**, Chairman of the Legal Committee of the Baltic Assembly

In 2004 the Legal Committee worked not only on the legal documents of the Baltic Assembly but also paid great attention to the common strategy of the Baltic States regarding implementation of the Schengen *acquis*, as well as to the urgent issues of preventing organised crime, the spread of drugs and human trafficking. These were also the main topics in cooperation between the BA Legal Committee and the NC Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee.

Mr. Pietkevičs reported that the Committee drafted a resolution on co-operation between the Baltic States in implementing the Schengen Action Plan.

- **Mrs. Anna Seile**, Member of the Environmental Protection and Energy Committee of the Baltic Assembly

This year the Committee worked actively on set priorities – environment protection and energy related matters. In co-operation with the NC Environment and Natural Resources Committee, the Committee discussed the following issues: co-generation related issues; centralised and decentralised heating; development of alternative sources of energy. In the context of the Baltic Sea protection, both Committees were unanimous that it is of a great importance to set stricter regulations regarding discharges from vessels in the Baltic Sea.

As to energy sector it is important to stress that closer co-operation between the Baltic power industries is needed in order to promote the energy independence of the Baltic States.

Next year the Committee will continue the work on energy issues, environment protection, as well as on the urgent issue of forest resources and protection of wild animals.

- **Mrs. Jevgenija Stalidzāne**, Chairperson of the Social Affairs Committee of the Baltic Assembly

In 2004 the Committee discussed the following issues: health care financing system and labour market problems in the Baltic States. The parliamentarians of the Baltic States addressed health care issues in co-operation with the Nordic and Benelux countries. As a result of fruitful discussions, the Committee drafted a resolution on the system of financing health care in the Baltic States.

Another area of Committee's work was labour market policy and migration in the EU context. The Baltic Assembly organised a conference on labour market and migration in the EU context. During the conference parliamentarians of the Baltic, Nordic and Benelux countries discussed pending matters of illegal employment and migration. After the conference members of the BA Social Affairs Committee drafted a resolution on labour market policy and migration in the EU context.

Mrs. Silva Golde, Member of the BA Presidium, Deputy Head of the Latvian Delegation to the Baltic Assembly, outlined that it is of particular importance to state the concrete case, which caused a great concern for Latvia. The essence of this case is that the reconstruction work of the Latvian Company *Laval un Partneri Ltd* registered in Sweden was blocked by trade unions of Swedish builders. Trade unions of Swedish builders demanded to pay Latvian workers 145 Swedish kronas per hour. Trade union threatened to block construction work if the demand is not fulfilled. Since the conditions of Latvian workers have become intolerable, Mrs. Golde requested the Baltic Assembly to react by stating a special resolution.

Mr. Gabriel Romanus, President of the Nordic Council, noted that this case is very difficult and controversial issue in Sweden. As the representative of the opposition in Sweden's parliament, Mr. Romanus expressed his view that both sides could come to an agreement. He stressed that there was a possibility for peaceful settlement, since the Latvian Company was ready to accept the collective agreement for building workers in Sweden. However, the trade union demanded even higher wage for Latvian workers. Mr. Romanus shared his view that this was a mistake on behalf of the trade union, because Sweden's parliament supports free movement of labour force. He noted that a half year ago the parliament of Sweden rejected the proposal to impose special transition rules for workers from the new EU member states.

- **Mr. Uldis Mārtiņš Klauss**, Chairman of the Budget and Audit Committee of the Baltic Assembly

In 2004 the Committee worked on financial side of the Baltic Assembly activities. The Committee discussed the report on implementation of the BA budget for 2002; the report on implementation of the BA Budget for 2003, and drafted the BA Budget for 2005.

TOPIC II:

Social aspects of migration

- **Mrs. Jevgenija Stalidzāne**, Chairperson of the Social Affairs Committee of the Baltic Assembly

Mrs. Stalidzāne outlined that migration problems are high priority issues not only in Europe but also in a whole world. In this context the BA Social Affairs Committee deals with very important question - how migration can improve the situation in European labour market, and ensure attainment of goals set for the Lisbon Strategy. Mrs. Stalidzāne emphasised that increasingly more countries are involved in migration processes. For this reason, the migration is often associated with a fear that the influx of sufficiently large number of migrants into a country will increase the unemployment level, reduce salaries, negatively influence employment of local residents with low qualification, and increase competition in the labour market. However, in a long term perspective migration can positively influence effect of demographic ageing and increase human resources in the country. In a short term perspective migration can compensate for the cyclic changes and shortages in the labour market.

Speaking about migration processes in Latvia, Mrs. Stalidzāne stressed that migration processes in Latvia depend on the socio-economic factors. Therefore, Latvia has become rather labour exporter country. She highlighted that currently many high-qualified experts leave Latvia for better-paid jobs in foreign countries. That is so called *brain drain* process.

Mrs. Jevgenija Stalidzāne reported that the Social Affairs Committee prepared an appeal to the Baltic Council of Ministers to appreciate the situation that has occurred with the Latvian company *Latval un Partneri Ltd* in Sweden.

- **Mr. Alfredas Nazarovas**, Director of the Social Integration Department of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania

Mr. Nazarovas emphasized that migration issues must be co-ordinated on the European level, as migration causes various problems which cannot be resolved separately. He raised several questions the Baltic States should deal with - how we prepare migrants for participation in society; what are the duties and responsibilities of migrants; and what is the role of public and non-governmental institutions in this context? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to ensure state support for asylum seekers, since the integration of asylum seekers is an effective instrument to avoid marginalization of migrants. Mr. Nazarovas noted that there is a special procedure for supporting people who have received an asylum in Lithuania.

Nevertheless, there are few problems concerning migrants in Lithuania. Practice shows that foreigners are not motivated to learn the Lithuanian language. Another very substantial problem is ensuring social guarantees for migrants.

In conclusion Mr. Nazarovas stressed that parliamentarians should be very careful when addressing migration issues, as the solutions might cause unpredictable consequences in the future.

- **Mr. Ken Koort**, Adviser to the Minister of Population Affairs of the Republic of Estonia

In his report, Mr. Koort emphasized that Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania as the new EU member states will have to face problems which have been typical to the old EU member states. He noted that for a long time Europeans considered migration as a positive element, which solves problem of labour force shortage. The result of such an attitude is that some economic cycles in the new EU member states advocate large-scale migration as a universal remedy to economic problems. Consequences of large-scale migration also caused a danger of radical Muslims. For this reason, negative experience of the old EU member states about the ambivalence of migration processes, as well as historic experience of the new EU member states in liquidating consequences of mass migration organised by the occupational forces, should provide guidelines for the EU migration policy in future.

Mr. Koort stressed that it is important to consider the following long-term objectives, when forming a migration policy: 1) linguistic integration; 2) legal and political integration that forms citizen's loyalty; 3) social-economic integration.

Co-reports

- **Mr. Inge Lönning**, Member of the Presidium of the Nordic Council

Mr. Lönning pointed out that the security situation in the world is changing rapidly and is becoming very complex. Therefore, a good framework of co-operation in labour market issues is needed, since migration is one of the main problems of the EU. As the good example of co-operation Mr. Lönning stressed the Schengen agreement. He noted that social aspects of migration are fundamental when approaching both – the reasons for migration and the challenges when integrating the migrants into society.

- **Mr. Jean-Marie Happart**, President of the Benelux Inter-parliamentary Consultative Council

There are three kinds of migrants in the Benelux countries: regular economic migrants, asylum seekers and illegal migrants. Illegal migrants cause major problems for the Benelux countries. However, Belgium provides support for migrants by paying them salaries, in order to make them more equal and to promote their integration into society. Mr. Happart noted that there is also a cultural and religious diversity in Belgium. The political refugees in Belgium are provided with job and certain social guarantees, but when the conflict in their homeland is over, they have to go back to their home country; even though, they are already integrated in to Belgian society.

Mr. Väino Linde, Vice-Chairman of the Legal Committee of the Baltic Assembly, noted that the open labour market within the EU has resulted in the fact that many young people leave their country for a work or studies in other countries of Europe. At the same time in Estonia there is a shortage of many skilled labourers.

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Mr. Andres Taimla, Vice-President of the Baltic Assembly, Chairman of the Estonian delegation, stated that it is necessary to continue discussions on Lithuanian

delegation's proposal on need to specify procedure how to transfer functions of the BA Security and Foreign Affairs to other structural units of the Baltic Assembly.

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National delegations of the Baltic Assembly adopted the *Appeal to the Baltic Council of Ministers on the occasion of the problems recently encountered by the Latvian company Laval un Partneri Ltd in Sweden* and decided to include this fact into the protocol of the BA Session.

See Annex No.1: Appeal to the Baltic Council of Ministers on the occasion of the problems recently encountered by the Latvian company Laval un Partneri Ltd in Sweden.

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On behalf of the BA Estonian delegation Mr. Andres Taimla, Vice-President of the Baltic Assembly, Chairman of the Estonian delegation, informed that the BA Estonian delegation will support adoption of the BA Budget 2005 in the amount of EUR 300, 261 with a notation in the minutes of the BA Session – namely, that the *BA Estonian delegation will vote for the adoption of the BA budget for 2005 in the amount of EUR 300, 261, but the membership fee of the Parliament of the Republic of Estonia will be EUR 65, 317. The BA Estonian delegation will take responsibility for supplying the missing part of finances of the BA budget or will cover the cost of events directly from the budget of the Riigikogu.*

5. Full texts of the decisions adopted in the Session

See Annex No.2: Documents and decisions of the 23rd Session of the Baltic Assembly

6. Results of voting

All documents were adopted in conformity with the principle of consensus.

- **Mr. Andres Taimla**, Vice-President of the Baltic Assembly, Chairman of the Estonian delegation

In his concluding speech, Mr. Taimla stressed that the last year was not an easy one due to reform process, which mainly was required by the Estonian delegation. The aim of the Estonian delegation was to establish direct contacts with the Standing

Committees of national parliaments of the Baltic States. By reducing a number of delegation members in the Baltic Assembly, the Estonian delegation wanted to increase the responsibility of the remaining BA Committees, and also increase the number of parliamentarians in the Standing Committees. He emphasized that the Estonian delegation was critical to itself and to the Baltic Assembly due to essential need to make the work of the Baltic Assembly more operative, flexible and target oriented. Next year the reforms should be continued in order to accomplish better planning and co-ordinating to avoid duplicating and misunderstandings.

Mr. Taimla suggested reorganising the work of the permanent Secretariat of the Baltic Assembly, so that by the rotation principle its tasks is given over to the country, which holds the presidency.

Mr. Jean-Marie Happart, President of the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council, stressed that problems may arise for the whole BA – BICC co-operation if the permanent BA Secretariat will be abolished, because it is typical need for the Benelux parliament to have administrative stability provided by secretariats.

Mrs. Silva Golde, Member of the BA Presidium, Deputy Head of the Latvian Delegation to the Baltic Assembly, underlined that the proposal of Mr. Taimla is unexpected. She stressed that the Secretariat of the Baltic Assembly is extremely important element of the Baltic Assembly structure, which embodies professionalism and stability.

On behalf of the **Nordic Council** it was stressed that the work of the Nordic Council is not imaginable without the permanent secretariat. There are various secretariats in the structure of the Nordic Council - the secretariat in Copenhagen, national secretariats and secretariats of political groups, regardless of discussions, which arise occasionally concerning the expenses of the secretariats.

Minutes of the 10th Baltic Council

The 10th Baltic Council took place on 18 December 2004, in Riga, and was chaired by Mr. Jānis Reirs, President of the Baltic Assembly and H.E. Mr. Artis Pabriks, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, Chairman of the Co-operation Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers.

- **H.E. Mr. Artis Pabriks**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, Chairman of the Co-operation Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers

Mr. Pabriks outlined that there are various pragmatic, emotional and philosophical reasons for the development of the co-operation and exchange of information between the Baltic States. He noted that much has been accomplished; nevertheless, there are various challenges still ahead.

One of the most important accomplishments this year has been the reform of the Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM). The reform has been aimed at facilitating co-operation based on pragmatism, purposefulness, flexibility and efficiency. For example, a number of Senior Officials Committees is reduced to five, in order to make the work of the Committees more flexible and mobile. New structure of the BCM facilitates the work of various *ad hoc* groups.

Mr. Pabriks reported on the following guidelines of the Latvian chairmanship in the BCM: 1) EU issues; 2) Security issues; 3) Free movement of persons; 4) Economic integration; 5) Protection of the Baltic Sea environment; 6) Co-operation in assistance and transfer of reform experience to third countries (Ukraine, Belarus, Caucasus and the Balkan countries).

1) EU issues

Exchange of information regarding matters of the EU and NATO has been carried out through different institutional levels – meetings of foreign affairs ministers and active co-operation within the framework of the BCM. Mr. Pabriks noted that particularly active in this context has been Trade and Economics Committee of the BCM, which has taken over the type of work of the relevant EU institutions.

2) Security issues

Joint projects of the Baltic States in the field of defence, which in the 90's were implemented with the assistance from Western countries, currently are being "*baltified*", namely, are being implemented with Baltic States resources. In the framework of trilateral projects there are various projects, such as BALNET (Air Surveillance System), BALTBAT and BALTDEFCOL (Baltic Defence College). Mr. Pabriks noted that the BALTBAT project is transformed, and a special Baltic Land forces' doctrine group was set up in 2004, in order to develop the capacity of special military forces of the Baltic countries.

3) Free movement of persons

Mr. Pabriks noted that this year a number of the Baltic border defence services' meetings took place. During the meetings representatives from customs discussed development of co-operation in fighting illegal migration and preparing for Schengen system.

4) Economic integration

Mr. Pabriks highlighted that in the road-building project *Via Baltica* there is a second investment program now being implemented. Concerning the *Rail Baltica* project, there are two meaningful steps to deal with in 2005: the visibility study and territorial planning of the project.

5) Protection of the Baltic Sea environment

Mr. Pabriks introduced to the work done by the BCM in environment protection field, by stressing that in 2004 almost fifty events took place in various environment connected areas, such as climate change, chemical products control, industrial pollution and others. Special attention was laid to the protection of the Baltic Sea from pollution, as transparency of water has become worse. In this context the Baltic States did the significant step, by expressing a unified attitude in the question of recognising the Baltic Sea as especially sensitive and vulnerable territory.

6) Co-operation in assistance and transfer of reform experience to third countries (Ukraine, Belarus, Caucasus and the Balkan countries)

Speaking about the assistance to third countries, Mr. Pabriks highlighted that the BCM, as a part of the Baltic co-operation, shows the successful model for regional co-operation, what could be used as an example for those regions, which have those processes still ahead. He stressed that new political status of the Baltic States makes us to work actively as a donor countries, by passing an experience in European and transatlantic integration and harmonisation of legislation. Therefore, it is of importance to allocate certain funds and resources for activities in those regions, in order to increase our influence and status in international politics.

- **Mr. Raul Mälik**, Director General of the Department for Policy Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia

Mr. Mälik emphasized that the Estonian chairmanship in the Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM) is challenging in two aspects. Firstly, the EU and NATO membership has changed the nature of co-operation between Estonia, Latvia and

Lithuania. Secondly, with the aspect of the EU, new structure of the BCM will be tested in new dimension.

Mr. Mälik introduced to the Estonian priorities in the BCM:

1) Baltic and regional co-operation

New modernised structure of the BCM means closer co-ordination of activities of the Senior Officials Committees and politicians who up till now have functioned separately. With the aspect of the BCM reforms, the active co-operation will be continued in the NB8 format, as Nordic co-operative structures are opening up for closer co-operation.

2) Co-operation in energy sector

As to energy sector, it is important to stress that within the EU new challenges opened for the energy market. At this moment the energy market of the Baltic States still cannot function as the separate model due to the small size and influence of the Russian electricity market. Therefore, a lot of attention was paid to the stabilization of regulations concerning electricity market in the Baltic States. In this context one of the tasks is to create a connection of the Nordic-Baltic electricity markets. Mr. Mälik noted that currently under the discussion is also the potential power connections Lithuania – Poland, and Lithuania – Sweden.

3) Transport and communications

Mr. Mälik emphasized that next year it is of a great importance to continue development of *Via Baltica* and *Via Rail Baltica* infrastructure projects. He noted that the project *Via Baltica* has reached its final phase. However, Estonia still has to complete the Pärnu - Paipas stage reconstruction project, and Latvia has to build its Riga bypass.

As to maritime sector, Mr. Mälik underlined two main priorities of co-operation: maritime navigation safety and security of harbours.

4) Co-operation in defence and security area

Along with the defence projects BALTNET and BALTDEFCOL, now it is time to extend the integration in NATO, as the Baltic States have much more advanced requirements and opportunities becoming NATO member states. In this context one of priorities for the next year will be monitoring and control of the airspace.

5) Co-operation in home affairs

Next year work of BCM Committee of Home Affairs will focus on the following issues: fight against trafficking in human beings, narcotics, and illegal migration.

In the conclusion Mr. Mälk emphasized that the BCM is looking forward to co-operate extensively with the Baltic Assembly in the implementation of Schengen agreement criteria, and joining euro zone.

- **Mr. Dalius Čekuolis**, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania

In the context of the enlarged Europe the Baltic States now have good perspectives for implementing the BCM priorities. Mr. Čekuolis outlined that the necessity to develop the Baltic electricity market is among the high priorities for the BCM, as the Ignalina nuclear ponds are shutting down. He noted that it is necessary to ensure investments to the Lithuania-Poland electricity network project, and the East-Finnish energy project.

Speaking about the defence matters, Mr. Čekuolis highlighted that the Baltic airspace actions should become an essential element of air surveillance system in the framework of NATO. After becoming the member states of NATO, much more advanced opportunities and instruments are available for the implementation of the defence objectives.

With the aspect of the co-operation in the field of domestic affairs, the BCM will focus on the implementation of Schengen Action plan. Mr. Čekuolis pointed that providing effective border control system asks for consideration of stable framework of legislation and administrative capacity. It is also of importance to ensure substantial financial support for the actions in the field of justice and home affairs. Mr. Čekuolis marked that the Baltic States could join the Schengen area in 2007, if all necessary preconditions are fulfilled.

Co-report

- **Mr. Olegas Skinderskis**, Director of the International Relations and European Integration Department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania

In his report Mr. Skinderskis stressed the necessity to co-operate in the implementation of Schengen criteria. Without effectively working border control mechanisms the accession to the Schengen area cannot be very successful. Mr. Skinderskis noted that free movement of citizens and labour forces does not mean that there is no border control at all. The Schengen Convention is a collection of legal

mechanisms; therefore, the Baltic States have a number of meaningful tasks ahead. Firstly, more legal instruments are needed in the field of customs and police. Secondly, it is necessary to strengthen co-operation in the provision of the Article 35 of the EU Accession agreement which determines the financing of the Eastern borders' control mechanisms.

Mr. Jean-Marie Happart, President of the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council, stressed that initial Schengen *spirit* was to create common borders by liquidation of the EU internal borders. However, various mechanisms and legal acts were implemented, in order to ensure the effective EU border control. Mr. Happart stressed that only after the implementation of border control mechanisms comes benefits of the Schengen area – free movement of labour force and capital, investment possibilities and information exchange. He suggested the Baltic States to make a great effort in implementation of the EU directives in regard of the Schengen Treaty.