

OPENING ADDRESS BY IRENA DEGUTIENĖ,
SPEAKER OF THE SEIMAS
REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

Madame Speakers,
Presidents of the Baltic Assembly,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have met to continue the tradition of over 20 years. Even though the BA was not established before 1991, the key political decisions had been taken at the time of the singing revolutions.

On 3 September 1988 the Baltic States liberation movements came together at the *Embrace the Baltic Sea* action. That was the beginning, the sparkle of fundamental changes and understanding that the strength of our nations lies in their unity.

The Declaration of the Rights of the Baltic Nations was endorsed in Tallinn in 1989. It declared their right to self-determination and free choice of political status, the right to preserve and develop their culture and peculiarity.

The *Baltic Way* took its beginning in Tallinn and extended for 620 kilometers in 1989. It connected more than two million people and demonstrated their aspiration to freedom and independence. It showed the ability of the Baltic nations to come together for the common vital goal that was charged with power, strong enough to break the empire.

The citizens of the Baltic States were not afraid. They proved this by their actions as they withstood the threats and allegation of the Soviet management that “the separatist consequences will be catastrophic to the Baltic nations”.

Cooperation between the three nations persisted after freedom was reached. On 1 December 1990 the Lithuanian Supreme Council hosted the meeting between the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian parliaments in Vilnius. The documents passed then demanded that the Soviet army stop demonstrating its power and violence, that the occupant army withdraw. The same meeting took the decision to found the Baltic Assembly, the 20th anniversary of which we are marking today. Let me recall the historical fact – the date of its establishment – the 8th of November 1991. The time of the turning point and grave challenges. I recall with pleasure the assistance extended to each other by the three sister nations at the Baltic Sea. We understood only too well then that if one failed, the others would follow, that our strength lay in our joint actions. Our wisdom stopped the soviets from employing the principle *divide et impera* (divide and rule).

Nobody doubts today that the Baltic Assembly is the historical symbol of cooperation between the Baltic sisters. However it is today that the Assembly is facing serious challenges and awaiting serious decisions. An unfortunate fact.

In reality, there is less unity between the three Baltic countries than we claim. Sometimes rivalry for insignificant trifles stifles every possibility of cooperation. We often want that the EU or NATO speak in one voice on the major issues but sometimes we fail to do so, although the interests of the Baltic States in strategic international relations and economic

matters fully coincide. This meeting of ours might be the best venue to try and clarify for ourselves what we need for our three voices to become a single voice.

The Baltic Assembly should look for ways to give a new impetus to building a new common identity and foreign and security policy of the Baltic States, which could lead to the creation of a Baltic security community where any security, economic or political problem of one country would be seen as a problem of the other Baltic states too. We can learn a lesson from the interwar period and the signing revolution: the Baltic States can avoid geopolitical turmoil only if and when they are united.

Energy security is one of the most critical challenges now. We must find the best and the quickest ways to be less dependent on gas imports, to promote competition in the gas sector, and to deal with vertical monopolies. Furthermore, the Baltic States continue to be integrated in the Eastern European rather than European Union power system. That is why it is so particularly important for the Baltic States to reach an agreement on our strategic goal to enhance our independent power generation capacity and simultaneously connect to the European continental energy system.

We must understand that no genuine political independence is possible without energy independence. These are intertwined problems that Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia face. We have our common geography and our historic past and present. Let me repeat that I believe that the more common understanding and concerted actions on this and other urgent matters, the more will be done for our present and our future, for our countries, and the whole Baltic region, for the whole of Europe. So may we be the Baltic Assembly not only in its symbolic, i.e. geographical sense, but in a unifying sense as well.