

Overview of the work of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee of the Baltic Assembly in 2011

Under the Estonian presidency in the Baltic Assembly the BA Legal Affairs and Security Committee focused on **safe society, including human security, internal and external security**.

Internal and external security and defence issues are unchangingly in the centre of attention of politicians, researchers, and the society on the whole. This is because security characterises the possibility of individuals, society and a country to survive and develop. Internal security of any country cannot be ensured if the security in the neighbouring country is threatened or distorted. The level of security in a country is thus under permanent influence of a neighbouring country. Therefore security matters and trans-boundary cooperation issues have to appear prominently on the agenda of national parliaments and inter-parliamentary assemblies. It is the duty of parliamentarians to have a proper oversight on the activities in the area to be able to recommend the respective governments about the necessary deepening and improvement of cooperation.

After restoration of independence and joining the EU and expanding the Schengen area in 2007, the Baltic States faced with new political, social and economic **challenges**:

- immigration of labour force from third countries;
- transit problems of illegal migrants to other European countries, and asylum seekers;
- mass emigration of the Baltic population.

Emigration from the Baltic countries is a serious challenge, which has acquired vast dimension especially as a result of economic recession. Unemployment has been the driving force for Baltic inhabitants to leave their country and look for a job in another state. In such a critical situation when Baltic nations are losing their skilled specialists, talented scientists and any other person, it is of utmost importance for the state to create conditions for these emigrants to come back. Moving away from the country has created a labour shortage prompting employers to seek **migrant workers** from other countries. But also – as a result of the crisis, when economy collapsed, businesses went down and jobs disappeared – less workers from third countries came.

Migration in the world is a growing trend. The reason usually is the difference in the standard of living and the wish to improve it, the desire for a better future. Migration is accepted if done in a limited and controlled way and does not influence the social system of a state. There are a number of benefits characteristic to migration. Experience from the Nordic countries, where extensive exchange of migrants is taking place show that migration affects the development in both the country of origin and the country of destination. Circular migration which includes a movement to a country and then back to the country of origin can bring gains to the country of origin in many ways: through the money sent home, promotion of trade flows and investments, transfer of knowledge as well as transfer of ideas and values that make essential contributions to the shaping of a society. In the country of destination, migrants often constitute labour for which there is a demand to fill needs for the

functioning of society. They also bring with them values and approaches from their countries of origin which benefit cultural diversity, broaden views and inspire new thinking. Migrants contribute to the creation of job opportunities and tax revenues both in their country of origin and the country of arrival.

But there are a lot of people coming to a country with no willingness to integrate and make their input into the development of a country. These people pose possible threat to the culture, social well-being and integration of the country. **National security** is not only territorial integrity, but also the strength and integrity of the national identity, which includes common language, history, traditions and values. Protection of national identity is the issue which has long ago been pointed out by the Baltic countries. Now when events in the North Africa erupted making many refugees to seek asylum in Europe, those European countries which were liberal in their views are starting to actively debate about multi-culturalism and consequences in the European countries. Multi-culturalism that was embraced by so many in Europe is now being condemned as a threat to national security, integrity and identity.

The Baltic States have to start thinking about the **refugee problem** already now even it is not a challenge yet. Even though there is no ability to accept refugees as there is no infrastructure, experience and financial resources to house, feed and protect them, in the spirit of solidarity it is essential to expand the role in Frontex operations etc. It is necessary to prepare the society to accept, integrate and cohabitate with people from countries, cultures, races and religions that dramatically differ from our own. We cannot close off our societies to new members, but it must be done with balance, care and with clear understanding and respect for national values, traditions, language and law. When migration is tendentially seen more as a security and stability threat rather than a potential for mutually balanced benefit for growth and development, the risks for widespread intolerance and subsequent acts of direct violence towards migrants tend to increase and get out of control. Media also contributes to the increase and consolidation of migrant stereotypes within the society which may lead to discrimination and violence.

Internal and external security and the borders between them have been eliminated. Internal security – as a security of a family, community and state, has taken broader perspective – in the context of the whole Europe. It is due to the free movement of people and goods; people's activities and their mobility differ from country to country and affect the neighboring states. With the growing global mobility new threats to security have gained importance. They defy geographical borders and affect all states. These transnational threats include cross-border crime, organized crime, and cyber crime, trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings. These crimes have a considerable cross-border dimension as they are often situated in different locations. Exchange of innovations and technological development, opening of state borders have paved extensive opportunities and challenges for social and political cooperation, as it has also created favourable grounds for expansion of organized crime. A lot of our activities are carried out on internet: bank transactions, signing agreements, exchanging emails, contacting in the social media. And all these possibilities are also greatly used by the organized crime.

Fight against organized crime requires coordinated efforts by member states as well as the cooperation on international level. Responding effectively to transnational threats

requires effective legislation and transnational action. Differences in legal treatment in different member states do hinder coordinated efforts and hamper international law enforcement and judicial cooperation. Therefore it is very important that different law enforcement bodies (state police, security police, financial police, customs, border guards etc.), regardless of separate competencies carry out the measures together so as to jointly fight the organized crime. It is also important to think about effective punishments, e.g. confiscation of financial profits gained by criminal activities.

The Baltic States should jointly come with their vision and their regional answer to the ongoing European and transatlantic discussions about the security and defence policies and strategies by identifying the security threats and challenges of an individual country and of the region on the whole. Our countries have to propose certain measures in transatlantic and European security policies and strategies, which have to be implemented on the national, regional and international level. It is necessary to define updated security, foreign and defence agenda, and to identify the financial, social, and political tools for short-term and long-term actions.

Next year the BA Legal Affairs and Security Committee will continue to focus on the issue of homeland security: contribution by the Baltic States to the development of the EU concept of homeland security. Together with the Baltic Council of Ministers it will also be a priority to ensure common actions in the fight against organized crime (VAT fraud, smuggling etc.) Another priority issue will be creation of single digital market: harmonization of standards, intellectual property rights.