

Speech by the Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania
The European Neighbourhood Policy – Towards a Europe with Common Values

Riga
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Dear participants of the Conference,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Can I first thank the delegations of Latvia, the Presidency of the Baltic Council of Ministers and the Baltic Assembly, for the initiative to hold the Conference “The Baltic States and the EU Neighbourhood Policy”. Although this issue is broadly discussed at various events, I believe we should revisit it repeatedly thus contribute to the development and progress of the ENP.

Since its launch in 2002 the European Neighbourhood Policy proved its merits as a comprehensive framework for EU relations with the neighbouring countries to the East and the South. The recent years experience, however, clearly indicates that it is essential to fine-tune the EU policy to the specific needs and problems of both regions.

With the appearance of the two Neighbourhood Policy dimensions, the Southern and the Eastern, it became obvious that the development of the latter was lagging behind even though this has not been formally recognised yet. Due to cultural differences, different historic experiences, different paces of the implementation of democratic and market economy reforms, as well as due to different aspirations of these countries to development of relations with the EU, the European Neighbourhood Policy - East and South cannot be homogeneous.

A difference between *European Neighbours* and *Neighbours of Europe* has gradually crystallised and eventually evolved within the European Neighbourhood Policy.

There are several non-EU countries, which can be referred to as *European Neighbours*. They are characterised by their aspirations to the European values of democracy, free market, rule of law, respect for human rights and for freedom of speech, and cultural diversity.

They have already achieved, or are on the right track of complying with EU social and economic standards. Most *European Neighbours* have an ultimate goal of acceding to the EU regardless of how long it might take.

Some *European Neighbours* are already technically capable of joining the EU but they do not apply for EU membership, as is the case with Norway and Switzerland. Other *European Neighbours* have a recognised perspective of EU membership (e.g. the Western Balkan countries and Turkey).

There is another group of *European Neighbours* in the East, which includes Ukraine, Moldova and the South Caucasus countries. Like the Western Balkan countries, they have declared their wish to join the EU and are already carrying out political and economic reforms that would bring them closer to the EU, but they are not granted a membership perspective. And yet these countries' belonging to Europe is indisputable.

Finally, there is another large and important group of non-EU countries that can be called *Neighbours of Europe*. They are close to the EU but neither pursue EU membership nor have any plans to do so in the future. The Mediterranean countries fall into this category. The EU should continue intensive cooperation with these countries in different formats.

The Neighbourhood Policy towards the Eastern *European Neighbours* should firmly rest on the concept of 'integration', primarily focusing on economic/sector integration and the internal market. Such integration would provide a sufficient framework for both the EU and its East European Neighbours to develop mutual cooperation and to expand the area of stability across the Eastern EU border. Their EU membership is not the question, which the EU would seek to answer immediately and at any cost. Rather, it is a long-term issue.

The process of EU enlargement has proved to be the most effective tool in transforming the political and economic environment of the neighbouring countries until the time of accession comes.

After the last successful enlargement, the new periphery has become increasingly important for the EU's internal and external security. The European Neighbourhood Policy provides a real opportunity for the EU to redefine its relations with those countries. The overall aim should be to offer to the neighbouring countries closer cooperation in the areas of mutual interest, as well as greater European integration in return for political and economic reforms.

It is premature to discuss whether Eastern *European Neighbours* will use the opportunity envisaged by Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, which stipulates that any European state may apply for European Union membership. We believe the EU should neither impose any political restrictions nor make attempts to close the door in front of such countries as Ukraine and Moldova, which have repeatedly expressed their

aspiration to join the EU. It is vitally important to avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe. We, the Baltic States, know the consequences of such diving lines.

The ENP is conceived to bring the neighbouring countries closer to the EU. The added value of the ENP is to give membership perspective to some Eastern European countries, i.e. proceed from cooperation to gradual integration. The ENP can serve as an instrument for integration only in case the countries make such a choice themselves. The question of new contractual relations between the EU and the neighbouring countries is not urgent and might be dealt with in the future, if those countries make a significant progress in terms of political, economic and administrative reforms.

Although the ENP and the European Enlargement Policy are considered to be distinct policies, some neighbouring countries' aspirations to EU membership should not be disregarded and their motivation power and stimulus for reforms should not be underestimated. I have already noted that although there is no direct link between the Neighbourhood and Enlargement Policies, the implementation of the latest ENP proposals concerning liberalisation of trade, approximation of legislation, and standards, etc. would facilitate the accession process once the political situation is ripe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is not long ago that Lithuania and the other Baltic States were the object of the Neighbourhood Policy. Thanks to EU support at that time we managed to meet membership requirements. Today we are ready to provide this kind of support to new Neighbourhood Policy countries. To this end the Centre for Parliamentary Cooperation intended for the development of parliamentary cooperation and experience sharing with ENP countries has been established in the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania.

Last week the first large-scale event was organised in Vilnius – the conference *Constitutional Principles of Authority Structure*. Representatives from the old EU Member States – Ireland, Germany and Finland, as well as guests from the European Neighbours – Georgia and Moldova attended the conference. We believe debates on such a significant matter as an authority structure of a state and interaction between its institutions was beneficial to Lithuanian parliamentarians while targeted sharing of European democratic experience will be a considerable contribution to accelerating the momentum of democratic processes in Georgia and Moldova.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to invite your countries' parliaments and experts to contribute to the future events arranged by our Centre for Parliamentary Cooperation.

I thank the organisers of the Conference for its smooth flow, for the team of competent speakers and the friendly atmosphere. I wish you productive work at the plenary and group meetings, valuable discussions and pleasant social intercourse.

Thank you for your attention.