

**Speech by Mr Bart Tommelein,
Deputy-chairman of the Benelux Parliament**

25 November 2011, Tallinn

It is a great pleasure and honour to address you on behalf of the Benelux Parliament at the 20th anniversary session of the Baltic Assembly.

Obviously, the first thing I want to do is congratulate you for these 20 years of fruitful parliamentary cooperation.

Furthermore, I am proud that I can state that we, as Benelux, as the oldest international cooperation agreement in Europe and pioneer of the European integration, were able to provide a model and source of inspiration for the Baltic cooperation.

It goes without saying that our outstanding cooperation has changed in content through the years.

During a first phase, we wanted to share our know-how in the field of international cooperation and to show that this could be a perfect forum to tackle cross-border issues.

The next phase was when we supported you in your application for membership to the EU, and to be an inspiring example of how three countries, despite their size, can influence the European agenda and European decisions, and how, by coordinating their positions and taking joint initiatives, they can strengthen their role within the European Union.

The Benelux cooperation also profiled itself more than once as a laboratory for Europe, for example with Schengen and in the field of police cooperation and energy.

It is also important to remind that the mutual cooperation between countries can extend beyond the cooperation between EU Member States, in accordance with article 306 of the EU Treaty.

In a European Union that is constantly growing, such a cooperation gives its members more weight. It is always a surprise to people when we say that the Benelux countries together have as many votes as countries like France or Germany!

Actually, we must establish interest-based coalitions in the enlarged Europe in order to solve current and future problems.

That is why the cooperation with the Baltic Assembly is still as essential for us today. I refer to our recent declaration on cooperation, signed in June 2011 in the Hague, when the following priorities of cooperation between our organizations were defined :

- establishment of a European energy community,
- human capital and knowledge based en innovative economies,
- health care and social policy,
- fight against illegal migration, organized crime, cross-border cooperation,
- integration policies and experiences.

Deepened cooperation must be promoted in order to respond to the consequences of global economic and financial crisis.

With regard to this, I can also announce as from now the trilateral meeting with the Nordic Council, in the framework of the fight against intra-community VAT-fraud, a topic which is a concern to all of us.

Together we stand strong, in a bigger Europe and in the middle of the financial and economic crisis.

Once again, congratulations and let's continue!

Thank you for your attention.