

## **Overview of the work of the Legal Affairs and Security Committee of the Baltic Assembly in 2012**

Under the Lithuanian presidency in the Baltic Assembly the BA Legal Affairs and Security Committee focused on the following matters:

- homeland security;
- fight against organized crime (VAT fraud, smuggling, etc.);
- creation of single digital market: harmonization of standards, intellectual property rights.

### **EU presidencies of the Baltic States**

(Lithuania's presidency over the Council of the European Union in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2013, Latvia in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2015, Estonia – the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2018)

The approaching EU presidencies should be viewed not only as a test of the country's administrative capabilities, but also as an opportunity to reflect and formulate the Baltic States' strategic EU development vision seeking to enhance the voice of the small states within the EU institutions as much as possible. Even when priorities are set by presidency trio, regional coordination can be instrumental. The priorities of the Lithuanian presidency of the EU include the Baltic Sea Strategy, the Eastern Partnership, energy independence, the Baltic regional cooperation, digitalization issues, and challenges of new technologies.

The Baltic Assembly is expected to provide fresh ideas and proposals on how to make the Presidency that will be held by all Baltic States in a row, with intervals of some years, an integral chain of cooperation in achieving the aims necessary for the Baltic Sea region and the European Union and in ensuring our future. The Baltic Assembly could initiate think tank activities and coordination of policies.

### **Combating the spread of drugs**

The Committee has discussed the issue about the use of illicit drugs. The problem related to the use and spread of illegal narcotic and psychotropic substances cannot be addressed and tackled by focusing only on repressive measures and activities of law enforcement agencies. Anti-drug policy will be the most fruitful and will bring more sustainable positive results in the long term if it observes a balanced approach and focuses on activities aimed at both reducing the supply of drugs (production, smuggling and sales) and curbing the demand for drugs (promoting a healthy lifestyle, teaching young people a positive value system, providing health-care services for addicts). Close and efficiently coordinated cooperation among responsible institutions representing diverse sectors and with relevant NGOs is crucial in implementing a balanced anti-drug policy.

**Regarding combating the spread of drugs, the Committee calls on the national parliaments and governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and the Baltic Council of Ministers:**

- to regularly provide society with widely accessible and objective information on the harmful impact of those controlled substances or substances subject to disposal that are included in international treaties and national legislation on

the individual health. To take effective and informative countermeasures against popularisation of opinions that threaten public safety;

- without undermining, if possible, national priorities, to define and defend joint political positions regarding the next EU Drugs Strategy, and through related action plans to urge law enforcement agencies to provide active mutual political and practical assistance during implementation of the Strategy and action plans;
- to allocate sufficient financial, human and technical resources for combating international and regional smuggling of narcotic and psychotropic substances, for combating the spread of these substances „on the street”, for implementing measures aimed at preventing the use of these substances, as well as for the treatment, rehabilitation and re-socialisation of addicts;
- to take into account the common interests of the Baltic people when drafting and adopting national legislation which would add new psychotropic substances insofar as possible in order to prevent a situation whereby in protecting inhabitants from the spread of a new psychotropic substance in one substances to the list of controlled substances and to harmonise legislative state, the health and safety of inhabitants living in neighbouring states are threatened.

#### **VAT fraud**

**The Committee calls on the parliaments and governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as the Baltic Council of Ministers to:**

- intensify the cooperation of the Baltic States regarding the fight against the VAT fraud;
- encourage regular cooperation and exchange of information among the tax administrations of the Baltic States;
- enhance regular cooperation with branches of the industry and banks of the Baltic States;
- encourage the exchange of information among the Baltic States and increase the frequency of the exchange of that information. In this framework, the Baltic cooperation can clearly inspire the European Union to optimize the functioning of the VIES system, in particular as regards linking VAT returns to the provision of goods and services between dealers in the EU Member States.

#### **“Baltic voice” in the European Union**

In 2012 the Committee has thoroughly discussed the issue of the “Baltic voice” in the European Union, evaluating its common efforts, involvement in the work of the EU

institutions and in the development of EU policies, as well as the common efforts in representing the interests of the three Baltic States through different formats, channels and sectors. Small countries have always been confronted with the possibilities to represent and to be heard on international level. Division into big and small countries within the European Union becomes topical when countries have to agree upon changes in the voting system and representation, or when countries have to coordinate their initiatives within the EU. Small countries have to defend their interests strongly and loudly, and through **forming efficient and flexible interest coalitions** that represent the region, the common interests are heard more clearly on the EU level.

**There are certain conditions in which the Baltic States can perform better. It is important to stay focused; finding the niche areas of competence and thus becoming contributors not only consumers. Priorities in Baltic parliamentary cooperation should be used on large-scale projects and finding new branches:**

- scientific, research and innovation field, for example the BIRTI project;
- new technologies, single digital market;
- common Baltic initiative on the VAT fraud;
- common long-term Baltic energy strategy;
- representing regional approach on the EU level in regard to the financing for decommissioning the Ignalina NPP;
- jointly raising the issue on energy isolation and energy security on all EU levels;
- increasing Baltic, Baltic-Nordic contribution to the EU decision making process;
- involvement into the European policies, supervision and parliamentary control;
  
- transport and infrastructure;
- assessment of the implementation of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy.

**The Committee had also highlighted new areas where cooperation on the Baltic level can be developed:**

- **Establishment of the Business Council** of the Baltic States, being important institution in strengthening the influence of the three countries in the business area, represent Baltic economies and export in the EU.
  
- **Development of joint regional tourism conception and foundation of the common Baltic tourism promoting institution.** Here the principle of cross-market (different cities promote each other) should be implemented instead of pure competition. The more the Baltic States promote themselves as a region especially to the countries far away, the more they will be perceived like that. There should be a more innovative ways of promoting the region, e.g. by the Baltic coast line (e.g. Palanga – Liepaja – Ventspils – Jurmala - Saarema).
  
- **Investing in culture and education** of youngsters, languages in border areas, preservation of the Baltic languages.

**In 2013** the BA Legal Affairs and Security Committee will focus on the issues of cross-border mobility, migration, immigration and asylum as well as on the development of single digital market.