

MINUTES

24th Session of the Baltic Assembly and the 11th Baltic Council

1. Time and venue of the Session

24 – 26 November 2005, in Tallinn (Estonia)

2. Names of the presiding officers and participants of the Session

Presiding officers of the Session:

Mr. Andres Taimla, President of the Baltic Assembly, Chairman of the Estonian delegation to the Baltic Assembly

Mr. Valerijus Simulik, Vice President of the Baltic Assembly, Chairman of the Lithuanian delegation to the Baltic Assembly

Mr. Aigars Pētersons, Vice President of the Baltic Assembly, Chairman of the Latvian delegation to the Baltic Assembly

3. Agenda of the Session

- The Future of the Parliamentary Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region;
- The Gas Pipe line in the Baltic Sea and its Impact on the Environment in the Baltic Sea Region.

4. Speakers and the essence of their speeches

Opening of the Session

- **H.E. Mr. Arnold Rüütel**, President of the Republic of Estonia

Having participated in establishing the Baltic Assembly and closely following its activities, Mr. Rüütel sincerely welcomed all participants in Estonia, and emphasized that the Baltic Assembly embodied a tradition of lasting cooperation among Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and mutually supportive spirit, irreplaceable in international relations. He expressed his confidence that three closely related countries had become allies whose contribution was appreciated more broadly than merely by the Baltic Sea region. Mr. Rüütel outlined that tasks the Baltic states faced in the early nineties had changed, and today's Europe and world, as a whole, deliver more complicated challenges; however, a need for lasting cooperation had not changed. The performance of the Baltic Assembly had proved that the organization was able to strike accord in the name of common success; therefore, it embodied the needed creativity and ingenuity to set accents in the Baltic cooperation after joining the EU and NATO.

- **Mrs. Ene Ergma**, President of the Riigikogu, Estonia

Mrs. Ergma in her welcome speech highlighted that the Baltic Assembly had been a school of international cooperation for the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian parliamentarians. She outlined that an effective parliamentary cooperation served both for withdrawal of the Soviet troops in the early nineties and was one of the central arguments used to show that the Baltic states were mature enough for joining the EU and NATO. Nevertheless, the Baltic Assembly has now to cope with a number of challenges; it has to become a pressure group, which actively and efficiently identifies and implements the interests of the Baltic states in the EU. Mrs. Ergma identified three main areas the Baltic parliamentarians together with their Northern counterparts should focus on: 1) Baltic Sea region as a residing and business environment; 2) energy supply; and 3) infrastructures. She also underlined other activity goals and specified priority spheres where the Baltic Assembly could provide essential contribution. For instance, the Baltic countries could more actively involve themselves in the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, especially in the Neighbourhood Policy. Moreover, the new EU

member states have an advantage in sharing experience in organizing society during transition and sharing integration know-how with Georgia, the Ukraine, Moldova and others to join the EU and NATO. However, in order to become a powerful body to reckon with, the Baltic Assembly has to work more precisely, efficiently and in a content-oriented manner. Therefore, Mrs. Ergma welcomed the parliamentarians to continue discussions about the reforms.

- **Mr. Arturas Paulauskas**, President of the Seimas, Lithuania

Mr. Paulauskas outlined that the Baltic Assembly had played a determinant role in strengthening regional cooperation and political relations in the Baltic region. Moreover, the Baltic Assembly had also established special political relations in the Baltic Sea region, it had provided a political continuity, complemented the common principles and each state's foreign policy's experience, enabled the Baltic countries to co-ordinate common goals then present to the world as a joint and firm position of the Baltic states. Nonetheless, in order to reach the common aim - security and welfare of people of the Baltic region - the Baltic states should focus on a smaller scope of priorities. It is necessary to find new ways to reform the Baltic Assembly through the common position on major issues, the representation of common interests as well as coordinated and well-targeted inter-parliamentary activity. He mentioned the issue of the gas pipe line construction in the Baltic Sea as an example where the Baltic states could make the common position and affirm solidarity. A. Paulauskas concluded: "If we continue to meet on a regular basis, we will know better and more about each other rather than discuss our affairs only in the clubs of Brussels and Strasbourg. The formula is very simple: small countries must unite their efforts in order to increase their influence on the international level".

- **Mr. Jānis Straume**, Vice-President of the Saeima, Latvia

Mr. Straume in his welcome speech underlined a long tradition of the Baltic cooperation, despite a number of factors that divided them: language, culture,

to some extent differences in speed of development and in quality, as well as competition. However, the unifying factors are too strong to ignore. If during the Soviet occupation the Baltic states kept more an intellectual “entente”, then nowadays the Baltic cooperation is more practical and rational. The Baltic cooperation is based on common interests and goals in foreign affairs and defence policies, especially competing with other European and global regions. Being small member states of the European Union with limited financial and human resources, the Baltic states alone cannot resolve all challenges. Mr. Straume cited a few examples of successful cooperation where the Baltic Assembly had proved to be irreplaceable coordinator of Baltic cooperation. One of them is to strengthen the cooperation between the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council, where the cooperation plan includes issues that are especially important to the Baltic states: raising welfare level, strengthening socioeconomic integration, resolving environmental issues and establishing relations with our new neighbours. In conclusion, Mr. Straume invited parliamentarians to focus on a long-term cooperation perspective and work purposefully, in order to be united and become a powerful body in Europe.

- **Mrs. Rannveig Guðmundsdóttir**, President of the Nordic Council

Mrs. Guðmundsdóttir in her address emphasized that after adoption of the BA-NC Ad Hoc Group Report which defined new priorities, scope, mode and forms of cooperation between the Baltic Assembly and Nordic Council, the cooperation between both organizations had moved from rhetorical to practical and more issues-oriented state of cooperation. She informed that currently both organizations were in a process of elaborating the joint Action Plan for 2006 based on the Ad Hoc Group Report. However, it is already scheduled to organize the BA-NC joint summit to be held in December 2006. Mrs. Guðmundsdóttir stressed that the Ad Hoc Group Report and Action Plan clearly illustrated central figures of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation, which had become strong and target-oriented. Nevertheless, Mrs. Guðmundsdóttir pointed out that it would be beneficial for the whole Nordic-Baltic region if all parliamentary actors in the region could build a common platform upon which

they could agree on prioritized issues and a functional division of labour. She gave an example of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference as a prototype for such a platform. She also said that it would be valuable to develop an interface between the Baltic, Nordic, Arctic and Barents regions, since these regions had many challenges in common.

- **Mr. Pawel Zalewski**, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Sejm of Poland

Mr. Zalewski highlighted that Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania shared the same historical experiences as well as similar points of view on many international issues and aspects. Poland together with the Baltic states are both Baltic Sea countries and members of the EU and NATO. Moreover, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania share the same priorities regarding strengthening democracy and economic development. Mr. Zalewski pointed out some specific issues which were currently the topic issues in the Parliament of Poland. First, security issues, especially in the context of the construction of the gas pipe line in the Baltic Sea. Mr. Zalewski expressed his view that parliamentarians of the Baltic countries and Poland had to persuade parliamentary partners in the EU to consider energy interests of the Baltic Sea region countries, and reconsider the energy security policy in the EU on the whole. Another highly important issue for the Parliament of Poland is creation of a new and much more sufficient neighbourhood policy directed to the Eastern Europe countries – Russia, Belorussia and Ukraine.

- **Mrs. Maya Detiége**, Chairperson of the BICC Cultural and Public Health Committee, representing the President of the BICC

Mrs. Detiége, on behalf of the Chairman of the Benelux Parliament, highlighted that the Benelux interest for intensifying common activities between the Benelux and Baltic countries was ever increasing. The working plan of the Baltic Assembly for 2006 sets an ambitious cooperation programme between the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council and

the Baltic Assembly - both on committee and presidium level. Since 1994, cooperation between both organizations had extended, and today cooperation priorities include such issues as migration, protection of the environment, legal defence and others.

Mrs. Detiége pointed out a tradition to organize a trilateral conference every two years among the Benelux Parliament, Baltic Assembly and Nordic Council. In May 2006, the trilateral meeting will take place in Belgium. This time Nordic, Baltic and Benelux parliamentarians will consider an extremely serious problem: drugs, which had become a real plague in Benelux countries.

- **Mr. Česlovas Juršėnas**, Deputy Chairman of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, Chairman of the Assembly of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania and the Sejm of the Republic of Poland

Mr. Juršėnas, in his welcome speech stressed the necessity to develop regional cooperation among the new member states of the EU, since the role of national parliaments in the EU was ever increasing. This is especially important for small and medium sized countries such as the Baltic states are. Mr. Juršėnas emphasized that the Baltic countries together with Poland should join their efforts to become a powerful force in the EU. Mr. Juršėnas pointed out that Poland and Lithuania had a longstanding tradition of cooperation, which had proved to be profitable and valuable for both parts. Solving problems at regional level is always more efficient and reasonable, especially in the context of both rapid globalisation processes and enlarged EU. Small and medium sized countries should search for new forms of influence in the European structures; therefore, acting as a common voice in the international arena is a priority for all Baltic Sea states.

- **Mr. Jonas Jagminas**, Chairman of the Assembly of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania and Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Mr. Jagminas briefly presented the Assembly of the Seimas of Lithuania and Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, which was a model of inter-parliamentary

cooperation that served to avoid new borders between the enlarged European Union, NATO and the countries that have not yet joined these organizations. Lithuania, as a member of the European Union and NATO, has been playing an active role in forming and pursuing the policy of these organizations in relation to Ukraine. As a firm supporter of democratic processes in Ukraine, Lithuania encourages the determination of Ukraine to join the European and Euro-Atlantic areas of cooperation. Mr. Jagminas expressed his delight that the inter-parliamentary cooperation between Lithuania and Ukraine had obtained a concrete and official form: a number of study visits and experience exchange programs are being implemented so that this interparliamentary cooperation serves to be an excellent example of supporting aspirations of Ukraine for democratization and integration in the EU. In conclusion, Mr. Jagminas invited members of the Baltic Assembly to express a firm and resolute position on the aspirations of Ukraine and seek various means of cooperation to deal with the issues of current concerns for the Baltic states and Ukraine.

**Topic I:
Future of the Parliamentary Cooperation in the
Baltic Sea Region**

- **Prof. Andres Kasekamp**, Director of the Foreign Policy Institute, Estonia

Mr.Kasekamp presented the research on the “Baltic Parliamentary Cooperation: from the Past into the Future” and introduced the main conclusions and proposals on reforms of the Baltic Assembly. He emphasized that the Baltic Assembly had achieved any exemplary results in its work and contributed enormously to the strengthening of statehood in newly independent Baltic states, as well as to the reinforcement of their foreign policy positions, even during the accession period to the EU and NATO.

However, much of the work of the Baltic Assembly between 1991 and 2005 had not brought concrete results. Mr.Kasekamp stressed that most of the documents adopted at the BA Sessions had triggered no feedback. Besides, an awareness of the activities of the Assembly is considered extremely low in the Baltic parliaments themselves. Therefore, the Baltic Assembly must define for itself the objectives of the Baltic cooperation and use them as a platform for shaping new forms of cooperation and the relevant budget. Moreover, the objectives of the Baltic Assembly must be viewed in the context of the EU membership of the Baltic states. He explained that changing international environment required constant adaptation of cooperation forms in accordance to changing conditions, and this was a problem not only for the Baltic Assembly but also for other parliamentary and regional organizations.

- **Valentinas Mazuronis**, Member of the BA Presidium, Deputy Head of the Lithuanian delegation to the BA

Mr. Mazuronis, in his address, highlighted main challenges and future perspectives of the Baltic Assembly. He emphasized that in 2005 the Baltic Assembly continued heated discussions about the reforms, in order to make the work of the Assembly more effective and issues-oriented. Mr. Mazuronis informed about the idea presented by the three Baltic states' parliaments' speakers to establish a working group for ensuring improvement of the activities of the Baltic Assembly. Mr. Mazuronis expressed his opinion that the reform process initiated in 2002 should be continued; however, the ongoing discussions should not neglect all positive achievements of the Baltic Assembly of the last 15 years. He stressed that it was of particular importance to continue work of the Assembly in existing format, because of intensive cooperation with the closest partners from the Nordic Council and the Benelux Parliament, and because of new initiatives proposed by the Nordic colleagues to develop cooperation with the Russian Federation, South Caucasus and Balkan states. When speaking about the structure of the Baltic Assembly, Mr. Mazuronis emphasized that it was necessary to intensify cooperation between the BA committees and permanent committees of national parliaments.

- **Aigars Pētersons**, Vice President of the BA, Head of the Latvian delegation to the BA

Mr. Pētersons in his speech focused on the future of Baltic parliamentary cooperation, since recently there had been a lot of discussions about such pressing question as “to be or not to be”. Mr. Pētersons stressed that although mechanisms for the Baltic states’ trilateral cooperation had proved their efficiency during the past 15 years, it was only natural that parliamentarians raised the issue of how to shape and perfect the Baltic trilateral cooperation in order to make it more effective and efficient. For this reason, it was necessary to provide an adequate political support for Baltic states’ cooperation as a whole and develop the Baltic Assembly’s long-term strategy. Nevertheless, it is needless to discuss the usefulness and purpose of the cooperation. A.Pētersons raised a rhetorical question: “Are we getting so preoccupied with assessing the Baltic states’ trilateral cooperation that we are neglecting the cooperation process itself?” He emphasized that strength of small countries, e.g. such as the Baltic states, lay in their ability to find allies and together with them represent their interests, but only on condition that there was sufficient political support, a long-term cooperation strategy and a cooperation mechanism between the Baltic parliamentary and executive powers which functioned as a unified system.

- **Arja Alho**, Chairperson of the BSPC Standing Committee

Mrs.Alho in her speech introduced the basic working principles and future plans of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), which after a number of reforms aimed to enhance the structures of the parliamentary cooperation and to strengthen the role of BSPC as a parliamentary dimension to the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS). For this reason, the BSPC now has extended its mandate and is now authorized to act and give its opinions also during the year and between the annual conferences. Moreover, the BSPC Standing Committee is enlarged to comprise also representatives of

the German Federal Parliament and European Parliament in addition to the earlier members having come from Baltic Assembly, Nordic council, Poland, Russian Federation and the Regional Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein.

Mrs. Alho, as a new Chairperson of the BSPC Sanding Committee, informed that in 2006, the BSPC would focus on the Northern Dimension and parliamentary support regarding the EU politics on that issue. She stressed that the BSPC offers a good platform for that kind of forum by representing both national and regional parliaments in the Northern Dimension region, as well as EU member states, Russia and the other parts of the Northern Dimension. Therefore, it is of particular importance to involve Russia more in activities of the Northern Dimension, which is also one of the priorities for the Finnish-EU presidency in 2006. Mrs. Alho concluded by emphasizing that a parliamentary cooperation on the northern issues and in the Baltic Sea region, on the whole, must not be led to the creation of new regional organizations. She offered the existing organizations and especially the BSPC to improve their performance and strengthen the parliamentary dimension of the cooperation in the North of Europe.

- **Ole Stavad**, Member of the Presidium of the NC

Mr. Stavad in his speech talked about the future cooperation perspectives between the Baltic Assembly and Nordic Council; and construction of the gas pipe line in the Baltic Sea. Mr. Stavad informed about the meeting among the presidents of the Baltic states and parliaments of the Nordic countries, which was held in May 2005. During the meeting it was agreed that it was necessary to intensify cooperation among permanent parliamentary committees of the Nordic and Baltic states. In this regard, cooperation among the committees of the Baltic Assembly and Nordic Council was put forward as a successful example of cooperation at a committee level. As to the construction of the gas pipe line, Mr. Stavad informed that there had been discussions in the Nordic Council about this sensitive issue, and a number of environmental experts were involved to give their assessment of the project. Moreover, the Denmark's Minister of Environment had announced the gas pipeline construction as one of the Denmark's environmental policy's priorities;

therefore, this matter would be thoroughly reviewed, in order to ensure environmental safety in the Baltic Sea region.

- **Mr. Trivimi Velliste**, Member of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly, Deputy Chairman of the Estonian delegation to the BA

Mr. Velliste emphasized that in mass media it was often stated that after the Baltic states joined the EU and NATO there was no sense in living in the past, and it was necessary to live in the future. Namely, that the Baltic cooperation had exhausted itself after the Baltic states joined the EU and NATO, and that it lacked a new common goal to strive for. Mr. Velliste disagreed about such statements, and raised question – who can say what the difference between the past and future is? How life of yesterday differs from life of today? He stressed that a dispute about the future cooperation goals among the Baltic countries was a sign of strength; therefore, the Baltic states should pay more attention to the longstanding experience they gained over the centuries. Mr. Velliste underlined that the Baltic Assembly during the 15 years of its existence had overcome many challenges and difficulties; therefore, it was difficult to measure the value of Baltic cooperation. Nonetheless, it was of great importance to define a clear-cut goal of the future Baltic cooperation, in order to make it more operative and issue-oriented.

- **Mr. Gennady Khripel**, Deputy Chairman of the Committee on International Affairs of the Council of Russian Federation, Head of the delegation of the Council of Federation at the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

Mr. Khripel, in his address informed about perspectives of the Baltic Sea parliamentary Conference (BSPC), and briefly introduced plans of the Council of Russian Federation for 2006. Mr. Khripel stated that the Baltic Sea region was highly important both for Europe and Russia, as it comprised a number of states around the Baltic Sea. Mr. Khripel also informed that on 21 November there was a ministerial meeting in Brussels on the political framework

document of the Northern Dimension after 2007. The document in the near future will be a strong stimulus for the work of all parliamentary structures in the Northern Europe. For this reason, it is of particular importance to strengthen regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, because without active regional cooperation the Northern Dimension will not be successfully implemented. Mr. Khripel outlined that the cooperation between the Baltic Assembly and Council of Russian Federation had both failures and success; nevertheless, the development of closer cooperation with the Baltic Assembly remained to be one of the main priorities for the Council of Russian Federation.

TOPIC II:

The Gas Pipe line in the Baltic Sea and its Impact on the Environment in the Baltic Sea Region

- **Prof. Dr. Mihkel Veiderma**, Member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences

Mr. Veiderma presented detailed research on possible consequences of the German – Russian gas pipe line's construction to the ecosystem of the Baltic Sea. He started with statistical data about the use of natural gas in Europe. Mr. Veiderma informed that in 2004 the global gas consumption amounted to 2.4 trillion cubic meters, 20% of which was consumed in Europe. In recent years, gas production and consumption had increased by 3-4% annually. At the same time, the consumers' dependence on gas input has also increased, for instance, today the gas input in the EU is more than 50%, and it is forecasted that by 2030 the EU will be dependent on 80% gas input from abroad. Besides, today Germany already depends on 78% input of natural gas. Therefore, the role of Russia will increase in future, because 26.7% of global gas reserves belong to Russia. Mr. Veiderma emphasized that in the near future demand of gas would grow rapidly in the Baltic states due to both

decommissioning of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant and transition to liberalised electricity market in Estonia.

Mr. Veiderma in his speech outlined possible threats to the Baltic Sea ecosystem posed by the construction of the gas pipe line. Firstly, threats could be caused by sunken ships and mines, chemical weapons dumped there during World War II and the following years. In Estonia alone it was recorded nearly 26 000 mines and 3000 other submerged items. Secondly, the Baltic Sea is rather closed sea thus there is a slow stream turnover; consequently, ecosystem of the Baltic Sea is highly sensitive than, for instance, ecosystem of the North Sea. Moreover, Germany and Russia had disregarded a number of international regulations: 1) requirements of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Convention; 2) provisions of international law which stipulates that a project of marine installations has to be coordinated and approved by countries whose marine environment they would concern; and 3) energy supply security requirements of the EU member states around the Baltic Sea.

- **Pawel Zalewski**, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Polish Sejm

In his speech, Mr. Zalewski highlighted the role of the Baltic states and Poland in discussions about the gas pipe line project. He stressed that the Baltic states together with Poland should be particularly active in ensuring secure energy supply from Russia, which is a great concern of all Baltic Sea states. Mr. Zalewski pointed out that the Baltic Sea states should require support from the EU regarding the development of oil and natural gas transit routes in the region. Namely, it should be determined that all actions involved in the development transit routes should comply with the EU requirements on security and energy supply. Mr. Zalewski also underlined that since the construction of the gas pipe line might affect the ecosystem of the Baltic Sea, at first the Russian and German investors should make a relevant environment impact study which is required by the Helsinki Convention and other international legal acts. This study should include detailed mapping of the bottom of the Baltic Sea with particular emphasis on places where chemical weapons are located. In conclusion, Mr. Zalewski expressed his

hope that a common voice of Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania would make their partners more conscious about interests and concerns of the Baltic Sea states, and that it would reinforce the idea of solidarity among the states.

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- **Mr. Anatoly Lyskov**, Vice-Chairman of the Legal Committee of the Council of Federation

Mr. Lyskov remarked that the agreement between Russia and Germany on the construction of the gas pipe line was signed in compliance with international treaties and conventions. Besides, Mr. Vladimir Putin, President of Russian Federation would not give his consent to sign the agreement if there were contradictions to international law. Therefore, there is no reason for concerns about possible threats to the Baltic Sea environment caused by the construction of the gas pipe line.

Reports of the Chairpersons of the Committees on the activities in 2005 and draft documents

- **Mr. Sven Sester**, Chairman of the BA Economic Affairs, Communications and Informatics Committee

Mr. Sester informed about the main activities of the BA Economic Affairs, Communications and Informatics Committee in 2005. He started with the main themes discussed at the Committee meetings, which were the following: *Rail Baltica and Via Baltica*; Baltic-Nordic labour market relations; ports development in the Baltic states; and issue of construction and exploitation of the gas pipe line in the Baltic Sea. Mr. Sester highlighted that together with colleagues from the Business and Industry Committee of the Nordic Council, they discussed the Baltic-Nordic labour market relations. However, together with counterparts in the Benelux Parliament they discussed different aspects and challenges of port policy both in the Baltic and Benelux countries. In conclusion, Mr. Sester presented the main priorities of the Committee for the

forthcoming year: firstly, issues related to the Baltic Sea fish resources management and fishing control; and secondly, rural tourism.

- **Mr. Olav Aarna**, Chairman of the BA Education, Science and Culture Committee

Mr. Aarna reported on the performance of the BA Education, Science and Culture Committee in 2005. He outlined that the Committee had organized a number of meetings: two meetings with colleagues from the Culture, Education and Training Committee of the Nordic Council and joint seminar with the Culture, Education and Public Health Committee of the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council. Together with Benelux and Nordic colleagues the Committee worked mainly with two topics: firstly, issues of education quality and issues of interaction between the education and labour market; and secondly, preservation of national culture. Mr. Aarna reported that as every year, the Committee had also organised the BA summer seminar. This time there was a joint seminar with colleagues from the Benelux Parliament on preservation of the national culture. It was concluded that due to the rapid development of technologies and fast exchange of information, the immaterial cultural heritage preservation had become one of the main issues of the cultural heritage preservation. At the end, Mr. Aarna outlined plans of the Committee for 2006. He highlighted that together with Nordic and Benelux colleagues the Committee would work on issues of vocational training – education as well as on protecting of cultural heritage against the mass culture.

- **Mr. Küлло Arjakas**, Chairman of the BA Environmental Protection and Energy Committee

Mr. Arjakas informed that in 2005 the Committee had two meetings during which parliamentarians discussed mainly two themes: firstly, issues related to the Baltic Sea as Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA); and secondly, forestry policy. The Committee discussed these issue together with

parliamentarians from the Nordic Council which means that the Baltic parliamentarians had a possibility to exchange experience and discuss and solve these issues from larger Baltic – Nordic perspective.

Mr. Arjakas underlined that in September the Committee signed *Memorandum of Understanding for Environmental Protection and Energy Committee of the Baltic Assembly and the Environment and Natural Resources Committee of the Nordic Council about Combating Eutrophication in the Baltic Sea and the Baltic Sea environment and shipping*. This memorandum is very essential as well as very topical for the Baltic states, since the Baltic states have a common neighbour – Russia, and therefore it is important to have a common position in the political dialogue with Russia about the Baltic Sea eutrophication problems. For this reason, the Memorandum would be a remarkable platform for that and special framework for Baltic – Nordic cooperation related to the safeguarding of the Baltic Sea. And in conclusion, Mr. Arjakas highlighted priorities of the Committee for the next year, which are the following: 1) further contribution to and development of PSSA (Particularly Sensitive Sea Area) status; and 2) environmental situation of the Baltic Sea.

- **Mr. Väino Linde**, Chairman of the BA Legal Affairs and Security Committee

Mr. Linde reported on the activities of the BA Legal Affairs and Security Committee in 2005. He noted that in 2005 the Committee worked in line with the following priorities: firstly, fight against corruption in the Baltic and Nordic countries, secondly, assurance of airport and seaport security; and thirdly, fight against organised crime. He informed that together with colleagues from the Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee of the Nordic Council they discussed problems of fight against corruption which was a long and complicated process, because it also included the fight against poverty and illiteracy. For this reason, the problem will continue to be on the Nordic Councils' and Baltic Assembly's joint political agenda with main focus on considering concrete measures that can be used in the fight against corruption. Mr. Linde emphasized that one of the most significant events of the Committee in 2005 was the round-table discussion on fight against

organised crime, held on 16-17 September in Jūrmala, Latvia. Participation of colleagues from the Nordic Council and the Benelux Parliament was of great importance for the Committee, because sharing of experience and exchanging of views gave all chances to solve more efficiently organized crime problems. Mr. Linde also introduced the priorities of the Committee for the next year: 1) migration and 2) protection of the airspace of the Baltic states.

- **Mr. Jūri Tamm**, Chairman of the BA Social Affairs Committee

Mr. Tamm informed about the performance of the BA Social Affairs Committee in 2005. He reported that in 2005 the Committee had three meetings in all three Baltic states – April in Pärnu, June in Palanga and October in Riga. During these meetings the Committee discussed mainly three issues: firstly, alcohol policy in the Baltic and Nordic countries, secondly, demography situation and family policy; and thirdly, surrogacy. Mr. Tamm informed that in June the Committee held a meeting on issues of demography, family and children in which also members of the Seimas' Social Affairs and Labour Committee participated. However, in October the Committee organized the round-table discussion on surrogacy, which triggered heated debates among participants of the discussion, as it was highly sensitive issue both in the EU and whole world. Members of the committee were unanimous that complexity of the matter demanded profound scientific research and detailed examination of social aspects, and potential risks, before adopting any legal regulations recognizing surrogacy as an alternative to fertility. Mr. Tamm also informed that in 2006 the Committee would continue to work with issues of family policy and movement of the labour force. The Committee will discuss both issues together with colleagues from the Benelux Parliament and the Nordic Council.

- **Mr. Vladimir Velman**, Chairman of the BA Budget and Audit Committee

Mr. Velman, in his report on the BA Budget and Audit Committee's activities in 2005, introduced the draft report of the Budget of the Baltic Assembly 2004 and to the draft Budget of the Baltic Assembly 2006, which was prepared in close co-operation with the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly.

- **Mr. Väino Linde**, Rapporteur from the Drafting Committee

Mr. Linde informed that the Drafting Committee had reviewed the following draft documents submitted for the adoption to the BA Session. First, Recommendation to the European Commission Regarding the *Rail Baltica* Project, submitted by the BA Economic Affairs, Informatics and Informatics Committee. Second, the Resolution on the Dangers Connected with Construction of the Gas Pipeline in the Baltic Sea, also prepared by the BA Economic Affairs, Informatics and Informatics Committee. And third document, the Communication on Measures Preventing Alcoholism, initiated by the BA Social Affairs Committee.

- **Mr. Trivimi Velliste**, Member of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly, Deputy Chairman of the Estonian delegation to the BA

Mr. Velliste introduced the Joint Statement (*See Annex No.1*) by the Baltic Assembly Presidium and the Nordic Council Presidium which stated the following: "The Presidiums of the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council have today adopted a joint working plan for the year 2006. They agreed, among other things, to closely follow the development of the project of constructing a gas pipeline on the seabed of the Baltic Sea, particularly what concerns its possible impacts on the marine environment. The Presidiums are of the opinion that it is of vital importance that a start of an infrastructural project of this size must be preceded by a thorough and open environmental impact analysis, in order to avoid a routing and construction that disrupts the

sensitive ecosystem of the Baltic Sea. The Presidiums therefore welcome that the gas pipeline project is brought up in the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) for review in accordance with the provisions in the Espoo Convention. The Presidiums expect that all possible steps will be taken to protect the Baltic Sea from environmental damage.”

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5. Full texts of the decisions adopted in the Session

See Annex No.2: Documents and decisions of the 24th Session of the Baltic Assembly.

6. Results of voting

All documents were adopted in conformity with the principle of consensus.

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- **Mr. Valerijus Simulik**, Vice President of the Baltic Assembly,
Chairman of the Lithuanian delegation to the Baltic Assembly

Mr. Simulik, as next President of the Baltic Assembly (BA) in 2006, in his concluding speech of the BA Session, outlined the core discussion points in the work of the BA in 2005, and introduced the working plan and cooperation priorities for the forthcoming year. He underlined that in 2005 the BA Presidium and Committees had extensively addressed the future of the BA and continued discussions about the reforms. Various proposals on the reforms triggered heated debates in the BA; however, it was unanimously agreed to enforce a more effective cooperation of the parliaments and governments of the Baltic countries in the EU. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge the role of the BA in providing an excellent platform for solving the problems arising among the Baltic states as well as for the coordination and formulation of their joint positions in the EU framework. Mr. Simulik expressed his view that members of the BA were fully aware of the benefits offered by the Baltic parliamentary cooperation and would promote further effective cooperation of the Baltic countries in the EU framework. As another highly significant task for the BA members was stressed the need to improve

the ties among the Baltic Assembly and the national parliaments of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. Therefore, a framework was established and approved with the view of informing the national parliaments on the operations and decisions of the Baltic Assembly.

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Minutes of the 11th Baltic Council

The 11th Baltic Council took place on 25 November 2005, in Tallinn, and was chaired by **Mr. Andres Taimla**, President of the Baltic Assembly, and **Mr. Urmas Paet**, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia; Chairman of the Baltic Cooperation Council.

- **Mr. Andrus Ansip**, Prime Minister of Estonia

Mr. Ansip, as a Chairman of the Prime Ministers' Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers, welcomed all participants of the Session in Tallinn, and emphasized that this was the right time to reassess the Baltic trilateral cooperation and discuss new ways of cooperation within the region. He underlined that there were all necessary means to strengthen the Baltic regional cooperation in the EU context: "The Baltic countries are among the most dynamically developing countries in the European Union. Our economies are growing – GDP 8% a year or more. Our standard of living is steadily improving. Together with the Nordic countries, we form one of the most dynamically developing regions in Europe".

Mr. Ansip also informed that the Baltic Council of Ministers had undergone extensive reform process. As a result, work of the BCM had become more pragmatic and focused. A. Ansip informed that the main working priorities were the following: cooperation on energy issues, transport cooperation and accession to the Schengen area.

- **Mr. Urmas Paet**, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Chairman of the Baltic Cooperation Council

Mr. Urmas Paet gave a brief report on how the BCM had generally performed implementing the priorities set up for the year 2005, which had been the first year of BCM functioning in a new structure under the guidance of the Prime Ministers' Council and the coordination of the Cooperation Council. Mr. Paet informed that the main item on the agenda of the Baltic Prime Ministers' meetings was Schengen related matters, since the process of accession to the Schengen area was complicated in all three Baltic states. For this purpose, the Task Force on Schengen issues was established, aiming to strengthen joint coordination and streamlining of efforts among Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the process of accession to the Schengen area.

Mr. Urmas Paet also introduced the main discussion points and conclusions of the meetings of the Prime Ministers' Council. Namely, the Heads of Government stressed the need for definite political decisions regarding the common Baltic electricity market, as changes in the world energy markets had a great also impact on the market power of the Baltic states. The Prime Ministers also discussed the prospects of building a gas pipe line in the Baltic Sea. It was outlined that the current development of the project to interconnect Russian and German gas pipe lines via the Baltic Sea raised several environmental and economical concerns; however, the Baltic states together with Poland should develop an alternative gas pipe line project such as the Amber pipe line to be more attractive for investors. In the transport sector it was concluded that upon completion of the *Via Baltica* reconstruction projects the main emphasis should be put on improvement of traffic safety and road infrastructure connections with neighbouring countries. Although, *Rail Baltica*, is in its stage of feasibility study, it should firmly stay in the focus of trilateral cooperation. The Prime Ministers also stressed the need to increase the efforts for the NATO air controlling solution in the Baltic countries and the further development of NATO air controlling policy. In conclusion, Mr. Paet highlighted that the reforms brought a new impulse into the activities of the BCM. But there remains the need to continue adjusting the work of the

Committees of the Senior Officials and arranging their smooth cooperation with the committees of the Baltic Assembly.

- **Mr. Dalius Čekuolis**, Undersecretary of the Lithuania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on "Priorities of the BCM for 2006"

Mr. Čekuolis introduced the main working directions of the Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM) in 2006. The membership in the EU and NATO gives the Baltic states new quality to their foreign and security policy. The Baltic countries are at the beginning of the road; however, they have already to make conclusions. For this reason, one of the main priorities of the BCM would be - transfer of the regional cooperation experience of the Baltic States to the states of the South Caucasus and Balkan region. Mr. Čekuolis noted that experience of the Baltic states was highly valuable for those countries; therefore, the Baltic experience in democracy could help South Caucasus and Balkan countries in their aspirations for integration in transatlantic organisations. Other priorities are: cooperation in implementing infrastructure and energy projects in the Baltic states, and protection of the Baltic Sea environment. Mr. Čekuolis informed that the BCM would also continue its cooperation with Nordic countries within the format NB8. He stressed that Nordic and Baltic countries together should strive for closer cooperation in order to implement common projects and influence the agenda of the EU.

- **Mrs. Vaira Paegle**, Parliamentary Secretary of the Latvia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mrs. Paegle in her speech accented the EU dimension in the Baltic regional cooperation. She outlined that the last fifteen years had been very dynamic both in the Baltic countries and in Europe on the whole. After the 1st of May, the biggest enlargement in the history of the EU, the Baltic states, as full-fledged member states of the Union now have to face various challenges, e.g. such as anxiety of the old EU member states about their jobs and security, slow economic growth rates on average in the EU, high level of

unemployment, and increased external competition. Nevertheless, the EU member states could overcome the challenges caused by globalisation, terrorism, migration and organized crime by consolidated performance and thus turn the challenges into the opportunities for Europe. To accomplish that, first of all, it is necessary to enhance the competitiveness of Europe - achieve higher growth, create more jobs and raise productivity – to increase the economic security of people. And second of all, it is necessary to develop political dimension of the EU by strengthening cooperation in spheres, whose basis is provided by two other pillars of the EU: 1) Common Foreign and Security Policy; and 2) Justice and Home Affairs.

* * *

Mr. Bronius Pauža, Vice-Chairman of the BA Economic Affairs, Communications and Informatics Committee, raised question whether the project “Rail Baltica” would be scheduled in time as planned, because in Lithuanian mass media it was predicted that general intention of the project had been changed.

Mr. Urmas Paet, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia, answered that the project “Rail Baltica” was planned to be finished on time. However, there are still a lot of questions to be answered and work to be done. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the project has been neglected as a whole.

Mr. Raul Mälik, Director General of the Political Planning Department of the Estonia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed his opinion that it was too early to make any conclusions about the project, because, currently the background studies of the project were being done. Nonetheless, there was a strong political will to accomplish the project and it would not disappear.

President of
the Baltic Assembly

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Andres TAIMLA
Republic of Estonia

Valerijus SIMULIK
Republic of Lithuania

Aigars PĒTERSONS
Republic of Latvia

Acting Head
of the Secretariat of the Baltic
Assembly

Dina TIHONOVA

***Prepared by Kristīne Sprice, Assistant to the Head
of the BA Secretariat on informative issues***

**Joint statement by the Baltic Assembly Presidium
and the Nordic Council Presidium**

The Presidiums of the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council have today adopted a joint working plan for the year 2006. They agreed, among other things, to closely follow the development of the project of constructing a gas pipeline on the seabed of the Baltic Sea, particularly what concerns its possible impacts on the marine environment.

The Presidiums are of the opinion that it is of vital importance that a start of an infrastructural project of this size must be preceded by a thorough and open environmental impact analysis, in order to avoid a routing and construction that disrupts the sensitive ecosystem of the Baltic Sea.

The Presidiums therefore welcome that the gas pipeline project is brought up in the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) for review in accordance with the provisions in the Espoo Convention. The Presidiums expect that all possible steps will be taken to protect the Baltic Sea from environmental damage.

Tallinn,

26 November 2005

FINAL DOCUMENT
of the 24th Session of the Baltic Assembly

The Baltic Assembly,

having convened on 24–26 November in Tallinn, the Republic of Estonia, for its 24th Session;

having discussed the future of the parliamentary cooperation in the Baltic Sea region and the gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea and its impact on the environment in the Baltic Sea region;

adopted the following documents:

Resolution on the Dangers Connected with Construction of the Gas Pipeline in the Baltic Sea,

Recommendation to the European Commission Regarding the *Rail Baltica* Project,

Communication on Measures Preventing Alcoholism,

Decision on the Head of the Baltic Assembly Secretariat;

approved the Baltic Assembly Budget Report for 2004 and the Baltic Assembly Budget for 2006;

defined the following priorities of the Baltic Assembly for 2006:

- 1) Preparedness of the Baltic states in the case of natural disasters. Natural disasters prevention and management;
- 2) Support the cooperation with new neighbors of the European Union through sharing of experience in improving the parliamentary democracy;
- 3) Threats and challenges posed by terrorism, and relevant preventive measures;

defined the following priorities for co-operation between the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers in 2006:

- 1) Transfer of the regional cooperation experience of the Baltic States to the states of the South Caucasus and Balkan Region;
- 2) Cooperation in implementing infrastructure and energy projects in the Baltic states;
- 3) Protection of the Baltic Sea environment;

decided that the 25th Session of the Baltic Assembly will take place on 14–17 December 2006 in Vilnius, the Republic of Lithuania.

President of
the Baltic Assembly

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Andres TAIMLA
Republic of Estonia

Valerijus SIMULIK
Republic of Lithuania

Aigars PĒTERSONS
Republic of Latvia

Tallinn, 26 November 2005

RECOMMENDATION
to the European Commission
Regarding the *Rail Baltica* Project

The Baltic Assembly,

considering the issue of implementation of the *Rail Baltica* project,

taking into consideration the accession of the Baltic States to the European Union and the significance of the *Rail Baltica* project for regional integration into the European Economic Area,

welcoming the decision of the European Commission to carry out feasibility study financed from the Cohesion Fund,

urges

the European Commission to carry out the mentioned study as early as possible, to agree on the railway route and the versions of technical solutions in all countries involved,

the European Coordinator to promote the process in accordance with Article 17a of the Decision 884/2004/EC amending guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T).

Tallinn, 26 November 2005

RESOLUTION
ON THE DANGERS CONNECTED WITH CONSTRUCTION
OF THE GAS PIPELINE IN THE BALTIC SEA

The Baltic Assembly,
seeking to achieve that

- the Baltic Sea preserves its uniqueness;
- the economic activity in the territorial waters and economic zone of coastal states of the Baltic Sea complies with the provisions of international law and laws and interests of the coastal states; and
- environmental risk assessment of the Baltic Sea proceeds from the status of the Baltic Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA);

being of the opinion that

- the realisation of large-scale energy infrastructure projects in the Baltic Sea region should proceed from the interest of guaranteeing energy supply security and safety of all states in the region, and that it is necessary to urgently make an integrated analysis of the energy situation of the EU member states in the Baltic Sea region which could serve as a basis for receiving the European Union's subsidies;
- during the construction and in further exploitation of the gas pipeline along the Baltic Sea floor, any kind of dangers, especially those arising from the chemical weapons dumped in the Baltic Sea after World War II should be eliminated;
- the construction of gas pipeline must not damage the ecosystems of the Baltic Sea or disturb the flora and fauna of the Baltic Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area;

draws attention to the fact that simultaneously with solving the issues of seabed utilisation for economic or other activities, the reduction of harmful effects and risks caused by chemical weapons dumped into the Baltic Sea must be dealt with in international cooperation, and

calls on the parliaments of the Baltic Sea states, the Baltic Council of Ministers and international organisations to focus their attention on the present situation and undertake measures to ensure that the assessment of all environmental impacts of the construction of the planned gas pipeline along the Baltic Sea floor is carried out in accordance with the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo, 1991), the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (Helsinki, 1992), as well as the valid legal acts of the European Union.

Tallinn, 26 November 2005

COMMUNICATION **on Measures Preventing Alcoholism**

The Baltic Assembly,

considering that the Baltic Assembly has repeatedly discussed the problem of the spread of alcoholism and alcohol abuse which is still not resolved successfully and therefore, first and foremost, threatens people's health, their mental potential and social development, influences unfavourably the demographic situation, creates a propitious ground for crime, and causes physical and mental degradation of present and future generations,

convinced that the important share of alcohol excise duty in the state budgets of our countries does not compensate for all the harm that our nations are subjected to through increased alcohol consumption, and considering that the allocations for prevention work by our governments are exceedingly modest and the activities in limiting alcohol use inefficient,

repeatedly **calls on** Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Governments to:

- elaborate effective, comprehensive solutions for restricting alcohol consumption, introduce measures that change the attitudes and customs in society and increase public awareness, as well as to plan and coordinate solutions for preventing illegal alcohol trade,
- pay particular attention to measures preventing alcohol consumption by children and adolescents, actively including the public administration institutions, non-governmental and civil society organisations, the media, educational institutions, international organisations and the family – the basic cell of society,
- pay special attention to projects and investments aimed at occupying the free time of children and young people and at the same time consistently broaden the alcohol-free space for adults and create conditions for leading a healthy lifestyle in work as well as home environment,
- regularly monitor submission to their parliaments of comprehensive reports on alcohol issues and the relevant situation in society, as well as to inform the Baltic Assembly of the implementation of the programme for reducing alcohol sale and consumption,

recommends that the Baltic Council of Ministers discusses the proposals in the Communication of the Baltic Assembly and starts rectifying the worrying situation,

proposes that each Baltic state declares June 1 or September 1 as an alcohol-free day, as well as plans other campaigns and cross-border activities in cooperation with neighbouring states.

Tallinn, 26 November 2005

DECISION

ON THE BALTIC ASSEMBLY BUDGET REPORT FOR 2004

The Session of the Baltic Assembly approves the Baltic Assembly Budget Report for the year 2004 in accordance with the attached Baltic Assembly Budget adjustments.

President of
the Baltic Assembly

Andres TAIMLA
Republic of Estonia

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Valerijus SIMULIK
Republic of Lithuania

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Aigars PĒTERSONS
Republic of Latvia

Tallinn, 26 November 2005

DECISION

ON THE BALTIC ASSEMBLY BUDGET FOR 2006

The Baltic Assembly approves its budget for the year 2006 in the amount of EUR 326,273, in accordance with the attached Baltic Assembly budget appropriations. The BA budget for the year 2006 includes membership fees of all three countries in the amount of EUR 300,260 and the surplus of BA budget for the year 2004 in the amount of EUR 26,013.

According to Article 44, paragraph 4, of the Baltic Assembly Statutes, the expenses necessary for ensuring the activities of the Baltic Assembly shall be shared equally by the parliaments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

President of
the Baltic Assembly

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Andres TAIMLA
Republic of Estonia

Valerijus SIMULIK
Republic of Lithuania

Aigars PĒTERSONS
Republic of Latvia

Tallinn, 26 November 2005

DECISION

on the Head of the Baltic Assembly Secretariat

The 24th Session of the Baltic Assembly decides:

To appoint Marika LAIZĀNE-JURKĀNE as the head of the Baltic Assembly Secretariat from 1 August 2006

To grant her all rights and obligations of the head of the Baltic Assembly Secretariat, including the right to sign financial documents of the Baltic Assembly as budgetary funds of the Baltic Assembly permit.

President of
the Baltic Assembly

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Vice President of
the Baltic Assembly

Andres TAIMLA
Republic of Estonia

Valerijus SIMULIK
Republic of Lithuania

Aigars PĒTERSONS
Republic of Latvia

Tallinn, 26 November 2005