

**Contribution by Mr Viktoras Muntianas
Speaker of the Parliament of Lithuania**

Assistance to Parliaments of New Democracies

Seeing what a complicated road is being covered by the civil societies towards their maturity in the EU neighbour countries, we remember the difficulties Lithuania had to overcome in building and strengthening its democratic institutions. Lithuania understands the challenges EU neighbours are facing. We know only too well what it means to change economic and ownership relations, to develop democratic values and solve social problems at a time. It is a complicated process, which is proved by today's developments in Ukraine. We are keen on democratic changes taking place in Eastern Europe and are committed to sharing our experience with those who need it. Lithuania as the supporter of human rights and democracy is expanding its activities year by year. It has an increasingly diverse range of projects and covers broader geographic areas. That is one of the key tasks of its foreign policy.

The Lithuanian Parliament perfectly understands its role in spreading democracy towards the east therefore it has been developing inter-parliamentary relations with the region and takes part in multilateral regional fora. Last year saw us together with our supporters implementing the first bilateral projects aimed at the exchange of experience with Georgia and Moldova, and we have started a similar project for Ukraine. This is too little, no doubt. Therefore the Parliament of Lithuania set up the Centre for Parliamentary Cooperation and tasked it with offering favourable conditions to the parliaments of Ukraine, Moldova, the South Caucasus countries for experience exchange with Lithuanian MPs and the Parliament staff. The events to deal with such matters as parliamentary procedures, the status of the opposition, the rule of law, parliamentary scrutiny over the enforcement of the legislation, combating corruption, etc are being scheduled. Maximum note will be taken of the priorities identified by the recipients. So far the "niche" of cooperation between parties has not been filled, however it might turn out to be an effective

exercise. The new Centre might be engaged in the Twinning programme, which beside other things, opens the door to EU funding.

We are ready to work together with other EU members. And here IPEX comes in as a very handy instrument.

There is much sense in inviting the supported countries individually and in groups for them not only to take over our experience but to develop a dialogue among them too, which will lead to stronger mutual confidence, needed for securing regional stability.

Belarus is an individual case. We have already realised that the policy of isolation is not effective, and maintaining ties with the opposition is not enough. The Lithuanian parliament has set up a parliamentary group for relations with Belarus, as it believes we must talk to lower levels of Belarus administration. We'll look for possible forms of dialogue.

Finally it's high time we started talking about our assistance to the Russian democracy in decline. EU members' discourse with Russia's democratic parties, which currently translates into the "opposition" parties, and with the institutes of democratic forces, as well as NGOs should be as intensive as possible and aimed at their unification. The need for long-term continuous projects is evident – in case those structures do not get EU assistance, they will simply cease to exist or the government will act in their name but for its own purpose. The EU parliaments should play a pivotal role in the field.