

**SPEECH BY H. E. ALGIRDAS BUTKEVIČIUS,
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA,
AT THE L COSAC MEETING**

**STATE OF PLAY OF THE LITHUANIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE
EUROPEAN UNION**

28 October 2013, 9:45 a.m.

Hall of the Act of 11 March, Building I of the Seimas

Dear Mr Chairman,

Members of Parliaments,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- The Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union welcomes the role played by the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union in addressing pan-European issues and is proud that **the jubilee L COSAC Meeting** is taking place here, in Vilnius.
- Speakers of national Parliaments of the European Union agreed 24 years ago in Madrid that national Parliaments should be more actively involved in tackling European Union issues. The Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union was established to achieve this objective. For nearly a quarter of a century COSAC has been making successful efforts to ensure that the Community is more democratic and more accountable to its citizens.
- The Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union is also seeking solutions that would serve the Member States and their citizens. I would like to stress that **this year is the European Year of Citizens** and I believe that the Lithuanian Presidency has been focused on responding to the concerns of all European citizens.
- I have the honour today to present to you the achievements and further work of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU. **Europe needs economic growth, reliability and openness more than ever.** It is these goals that the Lithuanian Presidency cares about most.
- We have a vital interest in seeing Europe demonstrating the economic and social policy results to its residents, neighbours, partners, investors and the rest of the world. It is very important to ensure this year that the Community stands on a firm footing, the European finances become the symbol of reliability and that the old continent continues to be an example of openness in the world.
- A number of works in this direction have already been done: in the face of the crisis, European leaders and politicians made very important decisions. I am pleased that the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU contributes to translating these commitments into effective legislation the implementation of which, I believe, will improve the welfare of us all.
- Recent years have showed that weak banks pose threat to the whole European financial system and that rapid EU response is necessary to avoid adverse effects. Therefore, we must work to create the **banking union** which will ensure that in the future EU banks will operate under common rules and that the interests of depositors will be better protected.
- The first steps have already been taken. The Commission submitted a proposal for a **Single Resolution Mechanism** and Lithuania held the first discussion on this matter during the Informal Meeting of Minister for Economic and Financial Affairs in Vilnius. Only by consensus

on the rapid development of the banking union we could ensure the financial stability and economic growth across the European Union.

- The economic situation remains fragile or it is even complicated in some Member States. We have to encourage Member States to seek a balance between the economic measures that would contribute to economic growth and job creation, on the one part, and social challenges, on the other.
- We have to pool our efforts – those of the EU institutions, politicians, diplomats, Parliaments and national governments – to overcome frequent challenges on our way. One of the tasks of the Lithuanian Presidency is **to ensure that next year funds from the 2014–2020 Financial Perspective reach business and Europeans in time.**
- **Lithuania managed to achieve an agreement of the Member States on the European Union budget for next year in a very short period of time.** Holding the Presidency, we make every effort to ensure that the political agreement on the conditions imposed by the European Parliament is implemented. Only together can we achieve that the new financial framework takes effect and enables us all to build a better future.
- Unemployment is one of the most challenging consequences of the crisis. It is especially painful that this problem affected a quarter of the young people in the European Union. This number is a serious warning that the younger generation of Europeans needs every help as soon as possible. The Lithuanian Presidency focuses on the problem of unemployed young people who are not in education or training. **Nearly eight million young Europeans neither work nor study.**
- The year 2014 marks the launch of the Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative. For the Initiative to be effective, the economic growth is essential in the Member States. How to promote and ensure it?
- The European Union has a lot of untapped potential: just three days ago the **European Council** in Brussels discussed economic growth, competitiveness and innovation that are important to the whole Europe.
- **The common digital market** may have the same hugely positive effect as the single market launched in 1992. EU legislation changes the life of each of us. Our lives would be more convenient if traveling to a foreign country we had to deal with a simpler administrative system, if we had an **integrated European payments market or our scientists, researchers and inventors had more opportunities for employment and careers.**
- The digital world is our future with enormous potential. Research shows that the digital economy is one of the largest sources for growth and innovation, **which can increase GDP to 10% within a decade.**
- Yet another basis for a viable and competitive Europe is **a single energy market, the completion of which by 2014 has been declared as one of the priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency.** We need a stable and transparent global energy market. The EU speaking in one voice with energy suppliers would not only help to achieve more competitive prices, but also further increase the importance of the European Union on the international arena.
- The Lithuanian Presidency believes that **openness** is one of the ways to encourage the economic growth in the European Union, to provide more opportunities for our citizens, and to strengthen our position globally.
- Over the past months of the Presidency, Lithuania has made considerable efforts to move forward with negotiations on free trade and association agreements with the Eastern Partnership countries.

- We all have a common interest to establish closer ties with our neighbours. The third Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius is to take place in less than a month. We hope for good results but both sides have to make efforts. It is our interest to have safe and economically strong states oriented towards European values in our Eastern neighbourhood.
- The Eastern Partnership is currently the most effective and almost the only instrument for the European Union to achieve this. The success of the Vilnius meeting will depend on the Eastern partners' determination and capacity for reform and on the common position of the EU member states and institutions and their support to the Eastern partners.
- Openness for our partners must be made explicit also by maintaining closer commercial ties with them. An important step in this direction is **the historic negotiations with the United States of America on a free trade agreement, launched during the Lithuanian Presidency.**
- There are yet two months of intense work ahead of us – after all, the Lithuanian Presidency agenda includes more than two hundred events, with 20 summits among them, in Vilnius and other cities of the country.
- However, even after the formal events of the Presidency are over, we will not be able to forget the work related to the Presidency – **Lithuania will have to actively participate in the implementation of the programme of the Presidency Trio and draft the national report on the Presidency**, identifying the work done and goals achieved.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- In conclusion, I would like to say that we have a lot of tools at hand that can promote economic growth in Europe, ensure the confidence in the financial system and become more open to the world. EU institutions and national governments realise that these objectives cannot be achieved without the support of the national Parliaments and the European Parliament. Only acting together can we overcome all the challenges and achieve all the goals set.