

Welcome address by Dr Vydas Gedvilas, Speaker of the Seimas, at the Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Rural Affairs

Distinguished Guests,
Fellow Members of Parliaments,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly happy and privileged to have an opportunity to welcome you all to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania.

In particular, let me congratulate the delegation of the Croatian Parliament, which is participating in the Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Rural Affairs as a fully-fledged national Parliament of the EU for the first time. Welcome to the circle of friends and colleagues.

The Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Rural Affairs is the second event in the framework of the parliamentary dimension of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In total, we have planned to host 9 events of the parliamentary dimension during the six months of the Presidency. We have been looking forward to all these events and have made careful preparations. Therefore, today I am extremely happy to welcome so many of you to Vilnius.

Fellow Members of Parliaments,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today you are meeting to discuss the common agricultural policy. It is one of the oldest policies of the European Union and it is natural that it is undergoing reform in response to new internal and external signals. Moreover, it is also one of the most costly policies and therefore requires a huge responsibility on the part of politicians in taking coordinated decisions that satisfy both farmers and tax payers.

We are glad that Ireland managed to successfully complete the negotiations on the reform of the common agricultural policy towards 2020. We can now focus on specific tasks of increasing competitiveness of farms, developing environment-friendly farming, addressing the challenges of climate change and seeking sustainable development of rural areas.

You have come to a country with very old farming traditions. Diligence and perseverance of our people and natural conditions have enabled Lithuania to develop modern agriculture and responsibly represent the agricultural sector not only in Lithuania but also in the EU. Lithuania exports agricultural and food products to almost 130 countries around the world earning approximately 20 % of total export income.

We introduced necessary reforms of the agricultural sector after the restoration of independence in 1990 and after Lithuania's accession to the European Union in 2004.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Taking this opportunity I would like to invite you to see the exhibition of unique historical documents in the Exhibition Gallery of Building 1 of the Seimas. The documents displayed in the exhibition witness long-standing ties between Lithuania and other European nations. Among the exhibited items, you can find the original copy of the Act of 11 March 1990 on the restoration of the independent state of Lithuania adopted by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania. I invite you to take this excellent opportunity to visit the exhibition.

In conclusion, I hope that you will have a productive meeting and a successful exchange of views and insights on the future of the agriculture, as well as share your national experience thus contributing to the common agricultural policy.

Have a nice stay in Vilnius. We hope to see you in Lithuania again.

Thank you.