

**Welcome Address by Loreta Graužinienė**  
**Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania**  
*Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Social Affairs and Labour*

11 November 2013, Vilnius

**Honourable guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,**

I am delighted and proud to welcome you to the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, the Seimas. This Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Social Affairs and Labour is of particular importance due to the lasting economic and social crisis in Europe. Although forecasts predict economic recovery in many European countries and most EU Member States should see economic growth next year, the unemployment level remains unacceptably high.

There are 26 million unemployed in the European Union, including 5.5 million unemployed young people, that means every fourth young European citizen is unemployed. Youth unemployment rate is almost 60 per cent in those countries which suffered the deepest economic and financial crisis, such as Greece and Spain. An increasing number of young Europeans cannot find jobs; they are neither in education nor in vocational training. Therefore there is a risk that many young people will find it difficult to integrate into the labour market in the future.

It is essential to support the initiatives recently launched by the EU institutions and the Member States. And by that I mean the Employment Package proposed by the European Commission last year, the Youth Guarantee scheme proposed by the Council this year and the Youth Employment Initiative adopted by the European Council according to which 6 billion euros will be dedicated to boost youth employment during the period of 2014–2020. These are appropriate steps to tackle unemployment. I would like to add that it is crucial to earmark those 6 billion to address youth unemployment. Absorption of EU funds is important but efficient absorption of funds is even more important. We should always think of economic benefits, return on our investments and added value. It is also important to ensure that the new jobs we create are long-term jobs.

However we should not forget that unemployment can only be addressed in essence by ensuring dynamics of European businesses and economic development. Moreover, it is not by coincidence that unemployment rates are among the lowest in the countries where flexible regulations of labour relations are in place.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that there are 4 million jobs available in the European Union, but the unemployment level is still high due to the mismatch of skills and labour market needs. This shows that professional guidance and vocational training of young people is not very well targeted. We have 4 million jobs available and it raises a logical question, why there are so many vacancies. I believe you will touch upon this question today.

Dear participants of the Meeting,

Let me wish you fruitful discussions.

Well before the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Seimas as the Presidency Parliament decided that the Presidency events should have specific outcomes. Therefore I would like to advise you to aim for a specific outcome of this Meeting too. We, as politicians, have a duty to inform our electorate, citizens of Europe, of decisions we adopt.

May I wish you an interesting and fruitful debate. I hope you will be able to find the best solutions for the benefit of your countries and people of Europe.

Enjoy your stay in Vilnius.

Thank you for your attention. Have a nice and productive day and look for the best solutions. Let us hope that vacancies available in the EU will be filled and 6 billion euros will be used efficiently so we can enjoy the effects of long-term employment.