

**SPEECH BY DR VYDAS GEDVILAS, SPEAKER OF THE SEIMAS OF THE
REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA, AT THE MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF
THE COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND CULTURE AND THE
COMMITTEES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION SOCIETY
“UNITED IN DIVERSITY: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS
OF EU LANGUAGES AND CULTURES“**

Vilnius

27 September 2013

Dear guests,
Colleagues,
Members of Parliaments,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am happy and proud to have an opportunity to welcome you all at the Seimas of the Republic Lithuania. I would particularly like to welcome the Chairperson of the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Croatian Parliament who is taking part in the Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Education, Science and Culture and the Committees on the Development of Information Society for the first time as a representative of a fully-fledged national Parliament of the EU. Welcome to the club of colleagues and friends!

The Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Education, Science and Culture and the Committees on the Development of Information Society is the fourth parliamentary dimension event of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Five more parliamentary dimension events out of nine will be held during the remaining months of this semester. We are all looking forward to them and making responsible preparations for them. Therefore, I am particularly delighted to welcome you all to Vilnius.

Members of Parliaments,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Linguistic diversity is a crucial part of culture and heritage of European nations. It is a treasure which we have to preserve at all costs, because if we lose our language, we will lose our identity and our links with our history and our ancestors.

The EU has come a long way of political and economic integration over recent decades. However, it is vital to ensure the preservation of rich cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe as we go down the path of deeper integration. I am delighted that the EU has been committed to ensuring this diversity. Ever since the founding of the EU, official EU documents have been translated into all official languages of the EU and the EU has been

focusing and spending substantial funds on the promotion of multilingualism. Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union clearly stipulates that “the Union shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity and ensure protection and enrichment of the European cultural heritage”.

Due to the processes of globalisation and highly increased mobility of people, the importance of the knowledge of languages has increased in today’s world. This is particularly relevant for Europe where people can freely travel to and work in other Member States. However, linguistically it is still very diverse. Therefore, education systems should encourage young people and children to learn languages as early as possible. We should also promote adult learning through various sport, cultural and media projects and through special training programmes.

The knowledge of the English language in today’s world is becoming especially important, because English has become today’s *lingua franca*, whether we like it or not. The lack of the knowledge of English makes it more difficult to participate in the European single market or maintain relations with the emerging markets of third countries. It becomes equally difficult to get the necessary information and expand the boundaries of cultural awareness.

On the other hand, we must make every effort to foster the knowledge of other European languages and promote their learning. It is vital to employ language digitalisation tools and develop language technology and research if we want to ensure cultural diversity. Designing and developing multilingual digital resources and tools have become a necessity for machine translation, since in times of information technology, many languages are facing digital extinction because of the failure to establish their presence in the information technology space. Therefore, technological solutions should bridge different European languages. I do hope that sufficient focus and funds under various EU programmes will be allocated to this end.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Taking this opportunity, I would like to invite you to visit the exhibition of thematic posters titled *Understanding the Lithuanian Language. An Old Language for Modern Communication* displayed in the Stained Glass Lobby of Building 1 of the Seimas. This interesting and interactive exhibition will give you a wonderful opportunity to take a deeper look at the roots of the Lithuanian identity and its key values through the uniqueness of the Lithuanian language. The exhibits also feature the Academic Dictionary of Lithuanian as well as other documents and books that shed light on the history of the Lithuanian language. I kindly invite you to take this wonderful opportunity and visit the exhibition.

In conclusion, let me wish you fruitful work and successful exchange of opinions and insights on the future of linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe.

Have a pleasant stay in Vilnius and we will be looking forward to your return to Lithuania!

Thank you.