

**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“**

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY AUDRONĖ PITRĖNIENĖ, CHAIR OF THE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND CULTURE**

Vilnius

27 September 2013

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe everyone will agree that we live in the era of globalisation, creating both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, we have to be able to integrate in the global community and to unite in order to achieve greater common goals. On the other hand, we have to retain our identity and stay diverse. What makes us diverse? Our beautiful diversity is reflected in our languages, which can further successfully exist in this digital age if we establish proper conditions. There is a popular idea now that a language that will not feature in computers is doomed to disappear. The computer is referred to here in the broadest and symbolic sense.

The issue of multilingualism in the EU was highlighted in 2008 when the European Commission published the Communication titled “Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment” and the Council adopted the Resolution on a European strategy for multilingualism. It was stressed then that multilingualism was a crucial and complex matter covering social, cultural, economic and educational aspects.

We appreciate and welcome the resolution of the European Parliament on endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union adopted just a couple of weeks ago. We cannot but agree with the European Parliament encouraging the Commission

to propose concrete policy measures which would protect the languages on the verge of extinction. We also support the Parliament's idea that a language revival policy is a long-term effort. This job must cover various fields, first and foremost – education, and be coordinated at both national and EU levels.

Therefore, the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union continues focusing on multilingualism. On 25–26 September 2013, the academic community, language technology and multilingualism experts discussed in the Seimas how languages and language technology could increase the mobility of European citizens, help them move freely and find jobs and would encourage us to be more active in public life. We are delighted to note that participants of yesterday's event, including European scholars, computer linguists, representatives of the European Commission, scientists from Vilnius University, Kaunas University of Technology, Vytautas Magnus University, colleagues from the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language, the Institute of the Lithuanian Language and ministry people, will also participate in our discussions.

We will continue the debates today on a political level in an attempt to discuss ways how to foster and preserve a linguistic identity in the digital space. We will also discuss how to create quality machine translation tools so that every EU citizen, who cherishes his/her native language, could lead a fully-fledged life in the EU. Let us not forget that the population of the EU increased this summer. Thus there are now more citizens fostering their language and enriching the list of official EU languages. Taking this opportunity, on behalf of my colleague Dr Mindaugas Bastys and my own, let me congratulate Croatia which has recently acceded to the EU. Its accession to our large European family is crucial for both Croatia and the EU. Mr Valter Boljunčić, congratulations to you and your people.

Dear Colleagues,

As we engage in debates, let us remember that we are part of the EU which celebrates diversity. If we are not able to start developing digital tools for our languages instead of using universal tools adapted to one common language, we will gradually lose our faces, our spirit and eventually our identities. Ask yourselves whether you would be able to say with pride, “I have no identity”. So, let me wish you interesting discussions and just decisions.