

Speech by

**Mr Valentinas Mazuronis, Minister of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania,
at the Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Environment Protection and the
Committees on State Administration and Local Authorities**

“Macro-Regional Strategies: Development and Prospects”

25 November 2013

Thank you, Chair,

My Dear Colleagues,

I am happy to welcome you to the meeting of the national Parliaments of the European Union held during the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU. You have a wonderful opportunity today to take part in debates on environmental objectives of macro-regional strategies, implementation of these objectives and the link between the strategies and other political and strategic documents.

Lithuania is a country of the Baltic Sea Region. Therefore, in my speech I will focus on one of the key priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU – the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and its implementation.

The European Council adopted the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in 2009 and stressed that the Strategy could constitute an example for other regions. It is a joint responsibility of all the Baltic countries. I would like to share the experience in how we fulfil our commitment.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is a complex system providing an integrated framework for addressing common environmental problems of the Baltic Sea, contributing to the economic success of the region, tackling social challenges, reinforcing territorial cohesion of the region and increasing the competitiveness of the EU.

This strategic document combines three key aspects, i.e. environmental, economic and social. In order to protect and preserve the environment of the Baltic Sea, to increase the region's competitiveness and to secure jobs, we need to coordinate the needs and interests in these areas. This can be done by involving all stakeholders into the decision-making process.

Let's look at the shipping sector. On average, there are over 2000 ships at the Baltic Sea daily; the shipping sector of the Baltic Sea accounts for 15 percent of the world's shipping. These

figures are very high. It is a growing sector, which not only creates additional jobs, but also has to remain competitive and to comply with strict environmental standards.

In order to keep the sector growing, it is necessary to involve all stakeholders into a very initial stage of consideration, prior to adopting any decisions, and to jointly discuss relevant matters in search of solutions that would be acceptable for all stakeholders.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region sets three objectives: to save the sea, to connect the region, and to increase prosperity. The aforementioned objective of saving the sea is directly related to the environmental status of the Baltic Sea.

The environmental status of the Baltic Sea is a common concern for the entire region, including public authorities, the private sector and each and every member of our society.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region establishes that at the regional level it is necessary to achieve good environmental status of the Baltic Sea, and to ensure proper and timely implementation of the Helsinki Convention and the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan. The implementation of this Convention demands resolute actions at the level of parliaments, governments, municipalities and the private sector.

We all have to understand that our entire region faces an increasingly significant challenge to preserve our natural resource, the Baltic Sea, and ensure its good environmental status. Dear Colleagues, I have no doubt that the situation is the same in the regions represented by you. Therefore when we speak about the development and prospects of macro-regional strategies today, we must particularly focus on sustainable use of resources. It is relevant in terms of pollution prevention, renewable energy, navigation and tourism policies, etc.

Let me stress that the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is related not only with maritime conventions. River basins are the main source of pollution of the Baltic Sea. The territory of Lithuania is divided into four river basins. The Nemunas River basin is the biggest one and covers more than 72% of the Lithuanian territory. The more we reduce pollution in river water, the less pollutants will travel to the Baltic Sea.

Lithuania managed to achieve very good results in reducing pollution in rivers. In the last report announced in summer 2013, the European Commission indicated that Lithuania was among the top four EU Member States in terms of compliance rates for secondary treatment of waste water. It is also important to mention that the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, through international conventions, encompasses environmental agreements with third countries, on the basis of which countries exchange information on improving the quality of water resources and seek to implement joint environmental projects.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, I will reiterate my appreciation of the fact that we have gathered together to talk about the importance of macro-regional strategies. I'd like to stress that we have to work jointly in pursuing key objectives, ensuring effective regional cooperation, exchanging best practices and implementing joint projects, which will help us bring prosperity to our countries.

Thank you, colleagues, for your attention and wish you every success in achieving concrete results, which will be mutually coordinated and ensure sustainable development.