

**Welcome Address by Mrs Loreta Graužinienė,
Speaker of the Seimas 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**

25 November 2013, Vilnius

Honourable Guests, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Environmental issues are very important when addressing them in every country individually and when adopting environment-related common EU decisions. It is noteworthy that the European Union applies environmental requirements that are among the toughest in the world. We would have not achieved this without you, dear colleagues.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Macro-regional strategies are relatively new policy instruments of the EU regional policy. We all remember very well the enthusiasm with which we welcomed the first EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in 2009. Members of the European Parliament from Baltic and Nordic countries contributed greatly to the appearance of the Strategy.

Four years have passed since 2009; therefore we can already see the first results of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. This Strategy, like other macro-regional strategies, does not have a separate budget or an institutional structure of governance. Despite that, we have achieved fairly much by coordinating joint actions among various Member States, and pooling resources from the financial programmes that are already in place.

Currently, there are over 100 projects being run under the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Over 400 hundred projects worth EUR 49 billion total are being considered by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, of which 150 are already in implementation.

I believe that the European Parliament has to continue supporting and developing macro-regional strategies at the EU level. However, national Parliaments should also be more active, because they are best suited to maintain the contacts between the strategic level and society at large.

I am convinced that if we work together, we will succeed in achieving much better results by adopting the decisions that will contribute to improving the environment.

Participants of the meeting,

In my welcome addresses to every Lithuanian Presidency meeting, I always emphasise how important it is to conclude all Presidency events with concrete results by adopting conclusions, resolutions or other specific decisions. I invite you too to conclude your meeting in the same spirit. Not only politicians, but our electorate too, the citizens of Europe, have the right to know about the decisions adopted.

In conclusion, I wish the meeting interesting presentations, an enriching debate and important decisions for the benefit of citizens of your countries and the whole European Union.

Have a pleasant stay in Vilnius!

Thank you.