

*Speech by Gediminas Kirkilas,
Deputy Speaker of the Seimas,
Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Seimas,
AT THE CLOSING CONFERENCE
OF THE 2013 EUROPEAN YEAR OF CITIZENS
HOW TO MAKE EVERY YEAR A YEAR FOR CITIZENS!*

13 December 2013

Vilnius

Distinguished participants of the Closing Conference of the 2013 European Year of Citizens, entitled *How to Make Every Year a Year for Citizens*,

Esteemed European citizens representing the civil society and non-governmental organisations, representatives of European countries, the European Union institutions, the Council of Europe and other international organisations,

I am more than delighted to welcome you here, in the Lithuanian Seimas in Vilnius, to the event that is so important for European citizens.

It is symbolic that this Conference takes place in the Presidency Parliament, as the Parliament represents the rule of people, by people and for people.

The European Year of Citizens has been aimed at promoting the engagement of European citizens into the EU's and national decision-making as well as voluntary and non-governmental activities. I am very happy to see the result. This Conference demonstrates that our joint efforts to make the EU more democratic have been successful.

The Conference has brought together a unique range of European civil society networks and organisations that are working closely to promote active citizenship as a core element of democracy in the European Union. These are 62 EU-level NGOs and networks representing more than 4.500 individual organisations in some 50 European countries. They cover a wide spectrum of issues, such as education, human rights, youth, gender equality, health, and citizenship. This is the largest ever coalition of civil society organisations in the European Union.

The work accomplished on the initiative of the European Year of Citizens is impressive. Therefore, I would like to congratulate the three working groups on their invaluable efforts in putting the EU's citizenship at the heart of the political agenda as reflected in a comprehensive document entitled *It's about Us, it's about Europe! Towards Democratic European Citizenship*.

In my capacity of Chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs as well as former Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Lithuania, I would like to point out that the European Year of Citizens and this Conference should send a strong message of support to our fellow European citizens in Eastern Partnership countries – Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus, where citizens are striving to be heard and respected by their governments.

As we are sitting here, warm and comfortable, the Ukrainian citizens are suffering from cold on the streets of Kiev, facing uncertainty yet standing up for a democratic and European future of their country. Therefore, I call on the Closing Conference of the 2013 European Year of Citizens to express solidarity with and support for the Ukrainian citizens.

Last but not the least, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the European Commission and the European Year of Citizens 2013 Taskforce for organising the event. I am equally grateful to the European Year of Citizens Alliance, the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Lithuanian Non-Governmental Organisation Information and Support Centre for their tremendous contribution to the organisation of this Conference. Thank you all on behalf of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU. You have made us all feel privileged and significant citizens of Europe!

I wish you fruitful and interesting discussions and exchanges of views, opinions, and good practises. Have a good time and enjoy your stay in our beautiful and charming Vilnius!

Let us make it happen! Let us make every year a year for citizens in Europe together!