

**Welcome address by Dr Vydas Gedvilas, Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania,
at the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the
Common Security and Defence Policy**

“Dear guests,
Members of Parliaments,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am happy and privileged to have an opportunity to welcome you all at the third Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy held in the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. In particular, I would like to congratulate the delegation of the Croatian Parliament taking part in this conference for the first time as a full-fledged national Parliament of the EU. Welcome to the circle of colleagues and friends!

This Inter-Parliamentary Conference is the third parliamentary dimension event of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. We will hold a total of nine parliamentary dimension events during this half of the year. We have been eagerly waiting and making responsible preparations for them. Therefore, I am particularly delighted to welcome so many of you here in Vilnius.

Dear Members of Parliaments,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today you have gathered to discuss the common foreign and security policy and the common security and defence policy. It is one of the most essential and relevant EU policies. We cannot but be happy about the changes in this field that have taken place over the last decade, especially after the Lisbon Treaty came into effect, strengthening the common foreign and security policy and establishing new measures for a more effective implementation of the policy. I am delighted to note that Baroness Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, will take part in the Conference. I appreciate the opportunity to thank her in person for her crucial contribution to strengthening the EU's positions globally and for her difficult diplomatic job not only beyond the European Union but also inside the Union when it comes to finding a common position of the EU Member States on the common foreign and security policy matters.

Mr Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO Secretary General, is also going to take part in the Conference as well as in the opening of the NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence in Vilnius.

Dear participants of the Conference,

Even though peace has been dominating the greater part of Europe for nearly seven decades while relations between countries have been based on law and mutual trust, other regions of the world, unfortunately, face quite a different reality. Recent developments in North Africa and the Middle East serve once again as a reminder to us of how important it is to have an effective common foreign and security policy, seeking to contribute to peace, stability, democracy, human rights and the spread of common social and economic progress in this region that is of crucial strategic importance for us.

Our Eastern partners also need effective engagement of the European Union. They are still stuck in geopolitical crossroads and they could make use of the EU strategic support in making key historical choices. Although more than 20 years have passed since our Eastern neighbours liberated themselves from the communist grip, democracy and human rights still find it difficult to get rooted there; there is still a lack of the rule of law. In the meantime, there are still some countries which project their relations with their neighbours through power and pressure.

This is the reality and the circumstances we have to act in. Therefore, I am certain that only a strong, integrated and effective EU external policy can contribute to positive changes in North Africa or the Middle East at this historically crucial and difficult period of time. I also hope that we will manage to reach a common position on key issues related to the Eastern neighbours while our efforts will be crowned with success at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius this November.

Dear participants of the Conference,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Taking this opportunity, I kindly invite you to visit the documentation and photography exhibition titled „Lithuania's Return to the World Community of Free Countries“, which was opened this morning in the Exhibition Gallery, Building 1 of the Seimas. This exhibition features key documents which consolidated the foundations of Lithuania's statehood, including the original of the Act of 11 March 1990 of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania on the Re-establishment of the State of Lithuania as well as the letters of credence presented by the ambassadors of the EU Member States, candidate countries and Eastern Partnership countries, which were signed by the heads of state, prominent politicians of the time. These are the documents that both record our historical developments and attest to the diplomatic and cultural traditions of the countries. I invite you to take this wonderful opportunity to visit this exhibition.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you productive work, i.e. successful exchange of opinions and insights on key subjects of foreign, security and defence policy.

I wish you a pleasant stay in Vilnius and we will be looking forward to your return to Lithuania some time in future again!

Thank you.”