

**Address by Mr Romualds Ražuks,
Member of the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly,
at the Plenary Session of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly
*10 June 2017, Zagreb (Croatia)***

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Colleagues,

I am very pleased – personally, and on behalf of the Baltic Assembly – for the opportunity to participate in the Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process and to convey the most heartfelt greetings from parliamentarians of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.

Our region and our countries are much closer than it might seem. We are going through the same European integration and European values strengthening way, supporting each other in overcoming of difficulties.

First, what I read yesterday in Croatian newspaper is an article about participation of 200 Croatian soldiers in a NATO battle group in Lithuania. Albanian and Slovenian soldiers are serving in NATO battle group in Latvia. Thus, countries from the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process are bringing security and stability to my own Baltic Region, fulfilling the decisions of the NATO Warsaw Summit.

As parliamentarian, I know that every decision to send soldiers on international mission needs a decision of national parliament. It is always a costly and courageous decision. On behalf of the Baltic Assembly, I want

to express our gratitude for participation in the NATO battle groups in our region.

The Baltic States feel serious security alarms due to regular reports about Russian aircrafts approaching the Baltic airspace and Russian ships entering the waters close to our coasts. These activities are complimented by propaganda, which entail dissemination of false information and other means of influence that altogether are understood as a hybrid war against our countries.

We followed closely Montenegro way to NATO membership. It happened this Monday. Our most sincere congratulations to our Montenegro colleagues, parliamentarians. We saw what pressure Russia used against your country to oppose integration in NATO, but you managed to oppose it.

Strong Europe and the European Union means, respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. Strong EU means stable economy, cooperation between its member states and its partner countries. Strong EU means stability in the region, which is important for the Baltic States and for you Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process.

The answer to all challenges by the Baltic States is target-oriented cooperation, stabilisation of our economies and, especially, taking of best practices used by our partners – Nordic countries – to strengthen our social systems and welfare models. We strengthen our regional cooperation, because together we are stronger. Solidarity in solving common challenges is of utmost importance. The Baltic States are cooperating on daily basis in

economy, energy, education, security and welfare. Together we build important regional infrastructure projects such as the *Rail Baltica* and *Via Baltica*. We work hard on independent Baltic energy market. We jointly represent the region on the international level. Strong and united Baltic Region is strategically important considering the current geopolitical situation. The Baltic Assembly ensure practical cooperation, which creates a strong counter tactics for those international actors who doubt and endangers Europe and transatlantic values.

In the current geopolitical environment, it is strategically important to strengthen our cooperation with our partners and allies. We closely work with our partners in the Nordic Council, Benelux Parliament and Visegrad countries. We continue to provide our support to Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and Azerbaijan within framework of the EU Eastern Partnership. International cooperation plays important role in strengthening of political stability and economic development as well as strengthening of democracy and rule of law.

For that reason, the Baltic Assembly expresses its support to the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process participating countries in their efforts for EU membership and Euro-Atlantic integration, strengthening the cooperation between the Parliamentary Assembly and with other international assemblies. You represent a regional power sharing European values.

The Baltic Assembly is open and ready for deepening of cooperation between our parliamentary organisations! By using this opportunity, I would like to invite delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process to the 36th Session of the Baltic

Assembly and the 23rd Baltic Council, which will take place on 9 - 10 November 2017 in Tallinn, Estonia.

I thank you and I wish you a fruitful Session!