



Latvijas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja  
**Prezidenta preses dienests**

Pils laukums 3, LV-1900, tālr. 67092123,  
prese@president.lv, www.president.lv

---

2016-08-29

**Address of President of Latvia Raimonds Vējonis at the opening of the 25<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference “High Quality Education and Labour – The Future of the Baltic Sea Region” in Riga on 29 August 2016**

Dear Madame Speaker,  
Vice-president of the European Commission,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am proud and happy to address you at the time, when we celebrate the historic events, which took place at the end of August 25 years ago, brought to an end fifty years of occupation and allowed the three Baltic States to become free and independent once again. This time reminds us about the value of freedom and statehood.

We were not alone on this road to our freedom. Our destiny is closely tied with our sisters – Estonia and Lithuania. We thank our Nordic neighbours, who helped us to return to the international family with their investments and encouragement.

For more than a decade, the Baltic States have been full-fledged members of the EU and NATO. We stand together bound by our beliefs and values and strive to achieve more on the global scene.

During these years, we have worked to make the Baltic Sea region economically vibrant, secure, and stable. Thanks to the openness of our markets and close economic ties, which we have established, the Nordic-Baltic region has developed very fast during the last 25 years and has become one of the most dynamic, IT- and innovation-oriented regions of the world.

However, the current global challenges in the world and in the Baltic Sea region demand that we put more efforts into strengthening our regional security.

The decisions on defense and deterrence measures in the Baltic Sea region were high on the agenda at the NATO Summit in Warsaw earlier this summer.

Let me reiterate that NATO's response by announcing the deployment of multinational battalions in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland has been defensive in nature, proportionate and in full compliance with international law and its international commitments. We continue to call on Russia to return to compliance with its international commitments.

At the same time, the difficult security environment has put renewed emphasis on the role of dialogue and cooperation in our region and beyond. We are dedicated to strengthening our regional cooperation in the areas, where true partnership among all parties is possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We cannot achieve much in our development without high quality education and a dynamic labour market. I am particularly glad that the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference has underlined the necessity for high quality education and equal access to the labour market as the main priorities. High quality education and labour are the future of our region. The

emphasis on labour opportunities, especially for young people, is crucial, as our Baltic neighbours and we face the challenge of movement of people to the countries with higher welfare standards.

Let me underline that the education systems of our countries play a crucial role in fostering and raising the competitiveness of the Baltic Sea Region not only at the European level, but also in the global context. Education is the foundation of our well-being.

Universities are centres of knowledge and innovation. The integration of research, higher education, and industry has to be the priority of our efforts. Through this integration, we can achieve increased knowledge-based development of our economy and exports and raise our global competitiveness.

I am particularly glad to see that the past five years have brought significant changes in young people's priorities with regard to the value of work and the way how they see themselves in the labour market. The increased involvement of our young generation is another foundation of our growth and well-being. Today most young people would prefer to become entrepreneurs and give employment to others or work on their own.

This is the reason, why the countries of the Baltic Sea Region must continue working together to ensure the best opportunities for young people so that they can become active members of the labour market and contributors to the economic well-being of our communities.

Let me now briefly turn to sustainable tourism, which is one of the growth areas of our economies. The Baltic Sea States meet one of the highest levels of biodiversity and unique cultural richness in Europe, which provide excellent resources for the development of sustainable tourism in this region. Ethnography, folklore, crafts, and traditions in each of our countries around the Baltic Sea create a synergy of environmental philosophy and ethics.

Thousands of lakes, islands, forests, and fine sandy beaches make our Baltic region an area of outstanding natural beauty. It is a precious asset, which we hope many will enjoy and appreciate as our sustainable tourism develops.

Constant cross-border cooperation among our countries and the private sector will improve competitiveness in more distant tourism markets and points to great potential when considering joint projects with national tourism organizations.

If developed and managed in a sustainable way, tourism can be instrumental in safeguarding biodiversity by minimizing the ecological footprint, providing green employment for local populations, channelling revenue back into conservation, and functioning as a vehicle for promoting awareness of environmental preservation.

In 25 years, much has been achieved to preserve our common asset - the Baltic Sea. However, I believe that we must take further steps. We need to aim to achieve a more coordinated approach to preservation, prevention of pollution, and use of our common asset. In conclusion, let me wish you all a successful Silver Jubilee conference! The parliamentary cooperation among our countries of Baltic Sea region will make us all stronger, better off, and safer.