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| <b>MSI</b> | <p align="center"><b>THE CHANCELLERY OF THE RIIGIKOGU</b><br/> <b>Department of Economic and Social Information</b></p>  |
|            | <p align="center">Tel +372 631 6502 Fax +372 631 6504 E-mail: <a href="mailto:msi@riigikogu.ee">msi@riigikogu.ee</a></p> |

## Interparliamentary relations between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

### About the Baltic Assembly

29.08.2003 6-5/101

The Baltic Assembly is an organization established for co-coordinating the Baltic countries' co-operation on the parliamentary level, discussing issues and projects of mutual interest, addressing common problems, and expressing a common position concerning international, economic, political and cultural issues.

The representation of three parliaments in the Baltic Assembly is based on the parity principle: it incorporates 20 members from each parliament - Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian. During the initial stage of their co-operation, the Baltic States focused their attention on regaining, reinforcing and protecting their independence; on getting international recognition in order to integrate into international and regional organizations, and, primarily, on the withdrawal of Russian troops from their territories.

Today the Baltic Assembly has broadened its scope far beyond matters of security and foreign affairs. Its constant concern has been the creating of a single economic area of the Baltic States. These activities include co-operating in various sectors by promoting the development of common social and economic co-operation programmes, developing a joint energy network, seeking common solutions to financial issues and to attracting foreign investments, co-ordinating co-operation in legislation with emphasis on the Baltic Customs Union and a common Baltic market. The Baltic Assembly is also actively engaged in cultural and educational issues.

In view of the foreign policy priorities set by the governments of the Baltic States, this parliamentary co-operation organization has regularly addressed the European Union (EU) and NATO with appeals to accelerate the accession of the Baltic States to the European Union and transatlantic structures; it has also has developed and maintained relations with other international organizations. Regular co-operation partners of the Baltic Assembly are the Nordic Council and the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council. The establishment and further development of the Baltic Assembly as a successful model of Baltic co-operation is an essential prerequisite for integrating the Baltic States into the European Union.

As a forum enabling the exchange of information and opinions, the development of problem-solution models, and co-ordination of actions by the parliaments of the Baltic States, the Baltic Assembly has succeeded in achieving the following:

- A great contribution has been made in solving the problem of withdrawing Russian troops from the Baltic States.
- The Baltic Council of Ministers has been formed as an institution of co-operation for the governments of the three Baltic States.
- The Baltic Assembly Prize for Literature, Arts and Science has been established to promote the development of these sectors and to create opportunities for the Baltic States to present themselves to the world.
- The development of a single Baltic economic area has been stimulated.
- Co-operation in harmonizing the legislation of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in conformity with the EU requirements in those spheres requiring such approximation has been facilitated.

- The situation and the facilities on the borders and the border crossing points have improved.
- Co-operation of the Baltic States in the sphere of foreign policy has been improved.

As a trilateral parliamentary co-operation organization, the Baltic Assembly has a stabilizing role: it enables the exchange of information and opinions among the members of the three parliaments, it facilitates the forming of ideas, positions and actions to be taken by each parliament in unclear or conflicting cases, and it helps a common position to be harmonized, if necessary, concerning the political developments outside the Baltic region.

As a parliamentary forum of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the Baltic Assembly is also instrumental in preserving the national identity of each country.

The main value of the Baltic Assembly lies in the opportunity for the parliamentarians to come together and to discuss problems of mutual interest. Although the resolutions adopted by the Baltic Assembly are only advisory, they urge the Baltic Council of Ministers to co-ordinate their actions and to solve the problems at the governmental level.

The Baltic Assembly - a parliamentary forum for Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania - plays an important role as a mediator between the states in finding solutions to problems of common interest and as a supporter of preserving the national identities of the three states.

[www.baltasam.org](http://www.baltasam.org)

### **Organizational structure of the Baltic Assembly**

The Statutes of the Baltic Assembly define it as an international organization established for the purpose of co-operation of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian parliaments. It consists of 60 parliamentarians - 20 each from of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - authorized by the parliaments of the respective countries. The size of a national delegation to the Baltic Assembly should be proportional to the size of political party factions in the parliament of each country.

The Baltic Assembly is an entity under international law, and it adopts decisions in compliance with the principles of equality, mutual benefit and unanimity.

The Baltic Assembly may express its view or position by issuing resolutions, recommendations, appeals, decisions, declarations or statements, opinions or memoranda. A view or position of the Baltic Assembly is expressed in the form of a resolution, decision, declaration/statement or recommendation if it is addressed to parliaments or governments of the Baltic countries; the Baltic Assembly may turn to international organizations and institutions, as well as to parliaments or governments of other countries, with appeals, proposals, declarations/statements or memoranda; initiatives, proposals or recommendations may be submitted to the Baltic Council of Ministers. During the eleven years of its existence, the Baltic Assembly has issued mostly resolutions (115), appeals (14) and declarations or statements.

The official languages of the Baltic Assembly are Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian.

To allocate financing required for its work, the draft budget of the Baltic Assembly for the coming year is approved during its annual session; decisions concerning the budget must be taken unanimously by all the national delegations. The funds of the Baltic Assembly consist of the contributions paid by the national parliaments. The drafting and approval of the budget and the allocations for financing the activities of the Baltic Assembly are regulated by Chapter 4 of the Baltic Assembly Statutes, which include provisions related to its property, financial resources and budget.

The structure of the Baltic Assembly is simple and consists of the following institutions: the session, the Presidium, the Drafting Committee and other committees, party groups and the Secretariat.

### **The Baltic Council of Ministers**

The Baltic Council of Ministers is Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian government co-operation institution and it has been founded on June 13, 1994. The highest decision-making authority of the Baltic Council of Ministers is a meeting of the heads of governments held at least twice a year.

The task of the Baltic Council of Ministers is to ensure continuity of co-operation on the level of the executive power. The Baltic Council of Ministers is responsible for co-operation of the Baltic States' governments, as well as co-operation between these governments and the Baltic Assembly. The Baltic Council of Ministers adopts decisions on implementation of proposals of the Baltic Assembly, solves significant issues in the context of the Baltic co-operation, elaborates and introduces necessary measures to promote broad and substantial mutual co-operation.

The Baltic Council of Ministers has a decision-making right only in case of presence of all Baltic States' representatives. Decisions of the Council are adopted basing on the consensus principle.

On September 13, 1994, the Baltic Council of Ministers agreed on establishing Committees of Senior Officials. The Committees ensure activities of the Council on ministerial level.

Presently 17 Committees are working.

To provide extra publicity and transparency to the work of the Baltic Council of Ministers and to improve dialogue with the society Virtual Secretariat of the Baltic Council of Ministers was developed. It was officially opened by the Prime Ministers during the meeting of the Baltic Council of Ministers on 18 February 2000.

Address: <http://www.bcmvs.net>

The status of the presiding state in the Baltic Council of Ministers is exchanged among the Baltic countries annually in alphabetical order. Since 1 January 2003 the presiding state is Lithuania.

The year 2003 is the first one when the presidency in the BCM is harmonized with the Presidency of the Baltic Assembly.

### **Baltic Assembly statutes**

The Statutes of the Baltic Assembly consist of eight chapters and 63 articles and define FOUNDATIONS OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BALTIC ASSEMBLY, structure, acting bodies, decision making process, co-operation with the Baltic Council of Ministers, work of the Secretariat and other basic principles.

At the 3rd Session, on October 31, 1993, the Regulations of the Baltic Assembly were enacted determining its structure and the basic principles of operation. The Regulations of the Baltic Assembly were supplemented and amended four times: at the 5th Session in November 1994, at the 10th Session in April 1997, and at the 13th Session in November 1998.

At the 12th Session on May 8-9, 1998, Mr. Daimar Liiv, a member of the Legal Committee and member of the Estonian delegation to the Baltic Assembly, proposed new [Statutes of the Baltic Assembly](#). The Statutes of the Baltic Assembly were finally adopted at the 14th Session on May 29, 1999, in Vilnius. Amendments to Article 54, paragraph 1, of the Baltic Assembly

Statutes were made at the 16th Session on May 27, 2000, in Tartu to regulate finances of the Baltic Assembly.

[The 21th Session of the Baltic Assembly](#) in December 2002 decided to introduce 10 Amendments in the Statute related with the reform process of the organization. The main changes were done concerning introduction of a one year (January to January) presidency in the Baltic Assembly starting from January 1, 2003.

### **Foundations of the activities of the Baltic Assembly**

1. The Baltic Assembly (BA) is an international organization for co-operation among the parliaments of the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Lithuania, founded on the basis of the joint decision adopted by members of the Supreme Councils of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in Vilnius on 1 December 1990. It functions on the basis of the Regulations of the Baltic Assembly approved in Tallinn on 8 November 1991, the Agreement of the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Lithuania on Parliamentary and Intergovernmental Co-operation of the Baltic States signed in Tallinn on 13 June 1994, the present Statutes and other legal acts adopted by the Baltic Assembly and its bodies.
2. The Baltic Assembly shall be an entity under international law, with the headquarters of its Secretariat based in Riga, Latvia.
3. The Baltic Assembly shall have its own symbols (logo, flag, seal, etc.) whose use shall be governed by the regulations on symbols approved by the Session.

### **Composition of the Baltic Assembly**

The parliament of each of the Baltic States shall appoint 20 parliamentarians to the Baltic Assembly (national delegation, including its head and deputy head), in accordance with the approved rules of procedure and the principle of proportional political representation in the national delegation.

### **Principles of Activities of the Baltic Assembly**

The Baltic Assembly shall consider issues and various projects which are of interest to the members of the national delegations and the member states; adopt decisions in compliance with the principles of equality, mutual benefit and unanimity; and develop co-operation with other regional, international, and inter-parliamentary organizations.

### **Languages of the Baltic Assembly**

1. The official languages of the Baltic Assembly shall be Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian.
2. Other languages shall be used in the work of the Baltic Assembly in the cases specified by these Statutes or by agreement among the delegations.

## **PRESIDIUM OF THE BALTIC ASSEMBLY**

1. The Presidium shall be formed for organizing the work of the Baltic Assembly.
2. The Presidium of the Baltic Assembly shall comprise the head of each national delegation and his/her deputy appointed by the parliament of the respective state.
3. Meetings of the Presidium shall be held at least four times a year.
4. A meeting of the Presidium shall be convened by the Chairman of the Presidium, who fixes the time and venue of the meeting and submits a draft agenda of the meeting.
5. A meeting of the Presidium may be attended by the chairmen of the committees and of the Drafting Committee, as well as by the members of the national delegations and other persons

invited by the Presidium. At least once a year the Presidium shall invite chairmen and vice chairmen of the committees and representatives of the Baltic Council of Ministers to its meeting to evaluate the activities of the current year and to set priorities for the next year.

### **The session of the Baltic Assembly**

The session of the Baltic Assembly is the supreme institution which is the sole decision-maker with regard to the activities of the Baltic Assembly; the session is empowered to make decisions if not less than two-thirds of the members of the national delegations are present, i.e., at least 40 members should be present at the session.

There are ordinary and extraordinary sessions. The ordinary session is convened once a year - in autumn - as a concluding forum of a country's presidency, which proceeds according to a yearly rotation principle in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Before the year 2003 there were two sessions a year - in spring and autumn and countries -participants had half a year chairmanship. Lithuania is the first who will have a one year chairmanship starting from January 1, 2003 and it is simultaneous with the Lithuanian presidency in the Baltic Council of Ministers.

Decisions of the Baltic Assembly shall adopt its decisions by voting. A decision shall be deemed to have been adopted if more than half of the members of all the national delegations to the BA have voted in favor of it. There are cases when decisions shall be adopted by consensus of the national delegations. Before voting on any issue, a national delegation have the right to request voting on the principle of consensus of the delegations.

To get more information, please look in the Statutes of the Baltic Assembly and read [about Decision making procedure](#).

Any national delegation may propose that an extraordinary session be called. On February 8-9, 1998, in Helsinki, following the 2nd Joint Meeting of the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council, the first, and until now the only, extraordinary session of the Baltic Assembly took place.

So far the Baltic Assembly has held 21 sessions. The 22nd session of the Baltic Assembly will be held in Vilnius, November 27 - 29, 2003.

### **Committees of the Baltic Assembly**

According to the new BA structure each member of the Baltic Assembly can participate at the work of one of six standing committees.

The former Economic and Social Affairs Committee was split into the Social Affairs Committee and the Economic Affairs Committee, which also undertook the tasks of the Communications and Informatics Committee.

Now the Committees are as follows:

[1\) Economic Affairs, Communications and Informatics Committee](#)

[2\) Education, Science and Culture Committee](#)

[3\) Environment Protection and Energy Committee](#)

[4\) Legal Committee](#)

[5\) Security and Foreign Affairs Committee](#)

[6\) Social Affairs Committee](#)

[7\) Budget Committee](#)

[8\) Drafting Committee](#)

Committees prepare various documents- resolutions, declarations, recommendations, appeals, decisions, memoranda and others to be adopted at the session of the Baltic Assembly.

It is also possible to take part in the work of Budget and Audit and Drafting Committees. The Budget and Audit committee shall be a standing committee to which two members from each

national delegation who are not heads or deputy heads of the national delegation shall be appointed with a right to examine and check any financial documents of the BA. The Drafting committee is appointed for editing and unification of all draft documents which are under consideration at the session of the BA.

1. Meetings of a standing committee shall be held at least three times a year, and meetings of ad hoc committees as often as necessary.
2. Meetings of committees shall be convened by their chairmen, who shall make up the agenda and set the time and venue of the meetings. Committee meetings should be held in each BA member state insofar as possible.
3. The members of BA national delegations, representatives of the governments, experts and other persons may be invited to attend committee meetings at the discretion of committee chairmen. Committees may organize joint events, and chairmen of the respective committees shall decide who will chair these events.

### **The political party groups of the Baltic Assembly**

The political party groups (factions) of the Baltic Assembly are formed for the purpose of expressing similar political interests and views. A party group should consist of at least five members representing at least two countries. Each member of a national delegation may belong to only one party group (faction). Party groups (factions) have a right to present draft documents to the Presidium or the session, and make the proposal to put them to the vote. Party group meetings were held for the first time during the 6th Session of the Baltic Assembly. During this year co-operation of the party groups of the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council has become more active. Reform process of the Baltic Assembly foresees more active of the work of the Party groups. Functioning of the Party groups is regulated by the Article No.25 of the Statute.. At the moment there are three party groups in the Baltic Assembly.

[Conservative/Right party group](#)

[Center party group](#)

[Social Democratic party group](#)

### **WOMEN'S GROUP OF THE BALTIC ASSEMBLY**

Formation of Women' s group of the Baltic Assembly was initiated by the Head of the Lithuanian delegation Mrs.Giedrė Purvaneckienė and Chairperson of Education, Science and Culture Committee Mrs.Irena Šiaulienė and was supported by women of all national delegations.

During its 20th Session on May 23-25 2002, a group met with s similar group of the Nordic Council as well as decided to form its legal basis. It could be considered as foundation date of the women group.

The 21st Session on December 14, 2003, adopted regulations on the activities of the Women's group of the Baltic Assembly which defines tasks and competence of the group, regularity of meetings, financial aspects etc.

Women' s group has decided to participate at the Meeting of the Social Affairs Committee of the Baltic Assembly on 5-6 June, 2003 in Šiauliai to debate about fight against trafficking in women and its social consequences.

[Regulations on the Activities of the Women' s Group of the Baltic Assembly.](#)

### **Baltic Assembly Prize for Literature, Arts and Science**

The Baltic Assembly Prize for Literature, Arts and Science was established on 31 October 1993 in order to promote the development of literature, the arts and science in each Baltic country individually, to disseminate these achievements in the other Baltic countries and to recognize the most distinguished achievements in these fields. The idea of establishing such prize was first raised at the 2nd Session of the Baltic Assembly on 29 May 1992 in Palanga. The prizes - a monetary prize, a certificate and special statuette are awarded annually at the session of the Baltic Assembly. According to the Statute on the Baltic Assembly Prize for Literature, Arts and Science, the nominations for the prize must be submitted to the national judging committees at least three months before the awarding of the prize. The national judging committees assess these works and nominate not more than the two best works from the fields of literature, arts and science fields for review by the Joint Judging Committee composed of prominent experts.

The first Baltic Assembly prizes were awarded in Vilnius, where the Assembly convened for its 5th Session. Among laureates of the Baltic Assembly Prizes are prominent Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian authors of fiction and poetry, a stage director, composers, musicians, a painter, a premier danseur, as well as scholars and researchers in the fields of archaeology, biochemistry and biophysics, the arts, history, architecture, folklore and literature

### **Contacts**

#### **Office of the Secretariat of the Baltic Assembly in Riga:**

Basteja bulvāris 12  
Riga, LV 1050 LATVIA  
Tel.: (+371) 7225 178;  
Fax: (+371) 7225 366

#### **Secretary of the Baltic Assembly**

**Baiba Moļņika**

E-mail: [baltasam@baltasam.org](mailto:baltasam@baltasam.org)

Project Manager

**Marika Laizāne - Jurkāne**

E-mail: [Marika.Laizane@baltasam.org](mailto:Marika.Laizane@baltasam.org)

Accountant

**Vija Breča**

E-mail: [baltasam@baltasam.org](mailto:baltasam@baltasam.org)

Assistant

**Dina Tihonova**

E-mail: [Dina.Tihonova@baltasam.org](mailto:Dina.Tihonova@baltasam.org)

**Aaro Mõttus**

Head of Department