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EUROPOS REIKALŲ KOMITETAS
SEIMAS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA
COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS**

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Please find enclosed the Declaration adopted at the international conference *The Enlarged EU and a Wider Europe* on 30 April in Vilnius.

Secretariat of the Committee on European Affairs
Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania

DECLARATION

ON THE INITIATIVE TO ESTABLISH THE PARLIAMENTARY FORUM OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA AND EASTERN EUROPEAN STATES

On 30 April 2004, the conference *The Enlarged EU and "Wider Europe"* held in Vilnius examined the issues of further co-operation between the European Union, European Economic Area and Eastern European states as well as future co-operation between the European Union and its new eastern neighbours.

The conference participants agree with the objective of the European Union to strengthen the ties of the enlarged Union with new neighbouring states, highly appreciate its European Neighbourhood Policy and believe that national parliaments as well as the European Parliament may contribute to the implementation of the co-operation initiatives between the European Union and Eastern European states.

The current enlargement of the European Union creates not only the conditions for the spread of democratic values and economic development, but it also poses new challenges for the region's states and the European Union itself.

The interdependence of the European Union and its outer circle – of the European Union's neighbours and the European Union itself – has already become a reality. With the aim of ensuring welfare and security of their citizens, equal attention should be paid to all the neighbours of the European Union.

The European Union has a duty to assist neighbouring states. Up till now, a major consideration has been given to co-operation with the Mediterranean Sea region. Nevertheless, with respect to the geo-strategic importance of the East European region, it is imperative to consolidate democracy and promote economic well being in this region as well. It is the European Neighbourhood Policy that is intended for bringing neighbouring states into the enlarged internal market of the European Union to such an extent that neighbours are ready for.

The conference participants welcome the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly following the Southern Dimension within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (Barcelona Process). On our part, we propose to institutionalise the Eastern Dimension of the European Union. One of the first steps may be the establishment of the Parliamentary Forum of the European Union, European Economic Area and Eastern European states. The Forum could include the European Parliament, the parliaments of Belarus, Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, of the European Union and candidate states, and of the states of the European Economic Area. We believe that such a step, as well as in the case of the Barcelona Process, will make the co-operation between the European Union, European Economic Area and Eastern European states more explicit, encourage a more active partnership and interest for this region in the European Union states as well as become one of the instruments of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The proposed Parliamentary Forum could provide the parliamentary partners with a possibility to exchange ideas and experiences concerning the ways how a democratic society in a modern state should behave while building a functioning market economy and relating to the fight against terrorism and organised crime while respecting human rights, ethnic minority rights and the rule of law.

The establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and the promising co-operation between the Mediterranean region states demonstrates that the co-operation between such partners as the EU Member States, neighbouring states and the European Union institutions can be effective and beneficial to all the states regardless of their differences. Therefore it is also in the Eastern European region that we must find institutional solutions allowing us to develop an agenda including the issues that are most relevant to the region and ensuring that every state can choose the optimal way of co-operation.

The proposed forum, embracing the parliaments of Eastern European states, the European Union and European Economic Area states as well as the European Parliament, would be of consultative nature and provide an opportunity to express views towards the European Neighbourhood Policy, especially on the issues relating to various aspects of the future co-operation between the European Union and Eastern European countries. The work of the forum could be organised taking account of the European Neighbourhood Policy priorities towards Eastern European countries. Hence the Parliamentary Forum of the European Union and Eastern Europe could become a powerful tool to speed up and enhance the implementation of the main European Neighbourhood Policy objectives as well as promote political dialogue.

The participants of the conference deem it necessary to address the European Parliament, the parliaments of the European Union and candidate states, of the European Economic Area states, of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in order to initiate the exchange of opinions on the establishment of a forum of the European Union and its new eastern neighbours.

Vilnius, 30 April 2004