

## **JOINT PRESS STATEMENT OF THE 12<sup>TH</sup> BALTIC COUNCIL**

On 16 December 2006 in Vilnius, the Republic of Lithuania, the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers have convened for the 12<sup>th</sup> Baltic Council to discuss issues of mutual importance of the Baltic States, to exchange views and positions between parliamentarians and governmental representatives of the Baltic States on regional goals and tasks as well as to evaluate progress on joint priorities of co-operation for 2006.

Baltic parliamentary and governmental co-operation is founded on a strong sense of historical, cultural and political affinity. The 12<sup>th</sup> Baltic Council reaffirmed the continued need for a close and mutually fruitful regional co-operation. The political arena for Baltic parliamentary and governmental co-operation is expanding, and the patterns of political interaction are changing. New conditions and new opportunities for co-operation have emerged since the Baltic States became members of the European Union and the NATO. Baltic parliamentary and governmental co-operation has to aim at strengthening social and economic integration in the Baltic region, supporting bridge-building to new neighbours, strengthening of security and stability, both regionally and globally. The 12<sup>th</sup> Baltic Council underlines that energy sector and common Baltic energy strategy, enlargement of the Schengen area, environmental protection and sustainable development, education and research policy, development of the economy, particularly information technology; as well as transportation and communications are important areas of parliamentary and governmental co-operation of the Baltic States.

The Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers have defined the following priorities for co-operation in 2007:

the role of the Baltic States in implementing the European Neighbourhood Policy in Eastern European countries;

the development of human resources in the Baltic States;

and decided that the 13<sup>th</sup> Baltic Council will take place in November 2007 in Riga, the Republic of Latvia.

Vilnius, 16 December 2006