



Council of the Baltic Sea States  
Presidency  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania  
J. Tumo-Vaizganto str. 2,  
LT-01511 Vilnius, LITHUANIA

Lithuanian Presidency 2009–2010

**Welcome speech by Ms. Asta Skaisgirytė - Liauškienė,  
Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania  
to the IX Baltic Sea NGO Forum 2010**

Your Excellencies  
Distinguished guests,  
Dear friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you on behalf of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States to Lithuania and the 9<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea NGO Forum. This is one of the key events of the Lithuanian Presidency and my thanks and congratulations go to its host - the Non-Governmental Organisations' Information and Support Centre. I am most impressed by the variety of high level speakers and experts that we will be hearing from during these two days, and thank you all for coming. My special thanks also go to all the sponsors of the Forum, all the organizations that understand the importance of our NGOs – the leaders of social engagement and the faithful keepers of democratic spirit.

As you have already heard in the past NGO meetings, the CBSS has recently undergone a reform which is aimed at “updating” the organization according to the new needs of the region. I am therefore heartened to see that you are also looking inwards, considering the most efficient ways to be effective in the ever changing conditions of modern life. I am very encouraged by the agenda and its strategic approach towards regional cooperation and to what it means to be the leading part of the civil society fabric in the Baltic Sea Region. For when it comes to the sustainable development of our region we are all responsible. And let me assure you, that we all feel the impact of the activities of the NGOs in our region on the most important issues of our lives, such as healthy environment, sustainable development, human rights, social inclusion, civil dialogue, cultural diversity, preservation of common heritage, just to mention a few.

It is therefore most important for the CBSS to partner your Forum. We are happy that the NGO Forum enjoys the status of the Strategic Partner to the CBSS.

Actually, within the CBSS reform process we have adopted the document which regulates Strategic Partnership (*The Principles and Guidelines for Third Party Participation in CBSS Activities and Meetings*). What this status implies was revised after your last Forum and I think it would be helpful for all of us to remind ourselves of what this status actually means:

- The overall presumption is that “third party participation strengthens the potential of the CBSS by improving the Council's capacity for practical action and its overall ability to advance regional co-operation.”



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- For this to happen “Strategic Partners must contribute to CBSS activities in line with its long-term priorities.”
- And in practice this means that “the CBSS and its working bodies and structures may decide to invite third parties to participate in CBSS activities.”

With this in mind I would like to remind you that the priorities of the Lithuanian CBSS Presidency include cross-border cooperation, from people-to-people contacts to joint projects, with clean environment and safe living conditions in the Baltic Sea Region on our minds. It is my opinion that this Forum is a platform which gives you the opportunity to formulate proposals for us within these priorities and give us feedback on what we are doing. This we welcome and I want to stress that the CBSS is always open for cooperation and consultation.

Speaking of third party participation to the CBSS there is another development that I believe would interest you. I am talking about Belarus having been granted an Observer State status in the CBSS as of last year. Relations with Belarus are high on the agenda of the Lithuanian Presidency and we note with pleasure that this is echoed in the long standing practice of participation by Belarusian NGOs in the NGO Forum throughout the years. I believe it is important to continue to use this Forum to keep dialogue with Belarus. This is an important avenue that can bring about better democratic cohesion than any official dialogue.

Dear friends,

I do not want to go into much more detail as we have two days to listen to highly qualified experts and engage in a dialogue. However I would not like to leave the podium without mentioning the situation that we find ourselves in the region. None of us have been left untouched by the global financial crisis. In these times it is vital that a gap between the citizens and civil society on the one hand and politicians and officials on the other hand does not emerge. The whole is never stronger than the weakest link and thus we must make sure that we are all strong and that we are all included in shaping our region. Best laid plans will not come to fruition unless supported and promoted by citizens of the region.

Dear friends, ladies and gentlemen, let me wish you a very fruitful Forum and again a very warm welcome to Lithuania.

Thank you for your attention.