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# Raimonds Vejonis (Hovedindlæg)

Chairman! Excellencies! Ladies and gentlemen! I am very pleased to have this opportunity to share my personal thoughts and vision of the Baltic Assembly on possible directions for further Baltic–Nordic parliamentary cooperation.

The Nordic–Baltic region can be characterised by stability, dialogue and cooperation. Its trademark is quality and high sense of responsibility in politics, economics and finance. Our approach towards regional cooperation is even regarded as a role model by other countries. The Nordic–Baltic region is economically and financially strong. We are the most competitive, stable and fastest growing region in the entire Europe. However, we are not perfect.

Dear Nordic friends, we have a toolbox full of regional networks and cooperation structures, but it is not enough to simply know how to use these tools in building a prosperous future for our nations. If we want to avoid being a European periphery and become a real role model for other regions of the world – and Baltic parliamentarians want that – we should focus on practical partnerships and establishment of practical Baltic–Nordic networks in those fields of life which have the most direct impact on our nations. We need global branding of the region. And in this context, I strongly advise the parliamentarians to recall recommendations suggested by Birkavs and Gade in the Wise Men Report published back in August 2010.

Dear colleagues, to a certain extent I agree with one of the conclusions drawn in this report, namely that the potential of the Baltic–Nordic cooperation is left neither fully utilised nor further developed. With this in

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mind, my colleagues from the Baltic Assembly asked me to outline just three directions in which the Baltic–Nordic parliamentary cooperation should go.

Firstly, we should focus on interconnections between the Baltic and Nordic regions. With this I mean both transport and energy interconnections. Without doubt, developed infrastructure and transport interconnections not only open up new possibilities of our people to travel but also increase our regional competitiveness. Therefore, the Baltic States are glad that Finland decided to join the Rail Baltica project. A well-functioning regional energy market is another valuable asset that we should strive for. The Estlink 2 and NordBalt projects are important, but we should also focus on renewables, energy efficiency and security.

Secondly, we should intensify exchange of our positions and coordination of activities within the EU regardless of our membership in this organisation. I believe that our regional voice on EU issues has to be louder. Businesses, NGOs and researchers have already suggested the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council to pool resources and to form a cohesive group of countries within the EU. This way we might become the European frontrunners in energy, smart technologies and competitiveness.

Thirdly, we should turn a new page in the book of Baltic–Nordic cooperation. During parliamentary and governmental meetings held this year within the framework of the Latvian presidency of the Baltic Assembly it has been stated that there is a need to enhance practical cooperation among our countries, and it should be done in fields such as regional tourism, research and innovation, the fight against organised crime, and development of the digital single market.

In conclusion, I would just like to assure you that the Baltic States are open and committed to the Baltic–Nordic cooperation leading towards a competitive and prosperous region. Thank you for your attention!

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