

Parliamentary action for peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16)

President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Speakers of Parliaments, Colleagues,

It is a pleasure to be here with you today to discuss topical matters.

At the heart of every state are peaceful, engaged societies, universal justice and strong institutions. This important objective of the Sustainable Development Agenda sometimes fails to receive the attention it deserves when we focus on meeting people's primary and basic needs. However, we should never lose sight of it. We need to create inclusive prosperity in every country, so that all people can lead secure lives in fair societies and have confidence in public institutions.

Lithuania's primary objective in implementing SDG 16 is to **improve the security of its population**. We continue to rank among the safest EU countries in terms of reports on locally occurring crime, violence and vandalism. Concurrently, the number of victims of human trafficking in our country is decreasing significantly. However, we must remain vigilant. Belarus has been conducting a hybrid attack against Lithuania and other EU countries in the region since 2021 through weaponising irregular migration. On top of that, many war refugees from Ukraine arrive in Lithuania as a result of Russia's brutal unprovoked war against Ukraine. The painful experience and difficult financial situation make both the war refugees and illegal migrants more vulnerable. Therefore, we stand committed to sustained fight against human trafficking and to ensuring border control.

Building **effective, responsible and inclusive institutions is crucial** for reaching SDG 16 objectives. This requires a competent and efficient public sector that efficiently contributes to proper public administration and meets the public expectations. This is an integral part of ensuring our aims of public security and the right to remedy for all.

Lithuania aims to further improve the national institutional set-up and increase institutional capacities and competence. To this end, two major legislative packages have been drawn up. They include the Draft Law on Budgetary Institutions and Draft Law on Public Institutions. These drafts are aimed at enhancing public governance by introducing its new model. Equally important is the new version of the Law on Local Self-Government, because it establishes a qualitatively new model of local self-government. With a view to the development of democratic processes in local self-government, this law extends the field of action for the municipal council minority and opposition. The new model of local self-government is expected to create more autonomy for municipalities and boost the efficiency of municipal administrations. At the same time, this will promote public trust in municipal institutions.

Lithuania is consistently striving to improve the local system of public governance. The main directions of improvement include increasing the efficiency and openness of public governance; raising public participation in decision-making on public governance; and improving accessibility

and affordability of public services. Openness and transparency (e.g. through the publication of data) adds to popular confidence in public institutions. Greater ownership by public authorities, inter-institutional cooperation, flexibility of public administration, and modernisation (e.g. through e-services) are the ways to strengthening public institutions and gaining public trust. Lithuania stands consistently on track to meeting this objective and is ready to share its experience.

Our country maintains a sustained focus on corruption as one of the most important social problems. Positive change in that area was driven by the implementation of anti-corruption measures covering a wide range of initiatives, including but not limited to education, control, and monitoring both in the public sector and in the society at large. The gains in the fight against corruption demonstrate that anti-corruption policy-making and anti-corruption awareness-raising measures are effective in creating a positive change across the nation and society.

In implementing SDG 16, it is important to ensure an equal right to justice for all. The Constitution and the legislation of the Republic of Lithuania guarantee the right of remedy to every person whose rights or freedoms are violated. Persons who are unable to properly defend their violated or contested rights on their own may be granted state-guaranteed legal aid under the procedure laid down by law. The increasing availability of state-guaranteed legal services from 2022 onwards means that residents are given access to state-guaranteed legal aid in a simple and convenient way remotely.

In the context of strengthening public institutions and increasing public trust, we should question whether the population can trust public institutions where a country is involved in a brutal war against another country. Russia has continued its brutal and unprovoked war against Ukraine for one year and eight months now. More than one million Ukrainian civilians have been expelled from their homes and forcibly deported to the Russian Federation or areas under its temporary control. Among these civilians, about 200,000 children were exiled. Russian public institutions are also involved in the killing of Ukrainians and the abduction and deportation of Ukrainian children. I insist that you ask yourselves what the authorities in your country have done to stop it. I am convinced that all over the world, in all countries, assistance to Ukraine is directly linked to people's trust in public institutions.

Today, the bloody attacks by the international terrorist organisation *Hamas* against the State of Israel cannot be ignored, either. The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania expresses its solidarity with the Jewish people and the State of Israel, and condemns the terrorist activities carried out in South America, Africa and other countries by the terrorist organisations *Hamas*, *Hezbollah* and the *Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps*, as well as the involvement of special services of the Russian Federation in these confrontations.

In conclusion, I firmly believe that resolution of corruption as well as bolstering of the public sector and self-governance inevitably leads to building stronger institutions and raising public trust. By

being open, inclusive and accessible, we should foster public confidence in political processes, public administration and the judiciary. Once we find the right tools and achieve good results, let us spare no effort in sharing the good practice and thus help other countries to follow suit.

Thank you