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**Speech by Mr Gediminas Kirkilas,
Deputy Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania,
Head of the Lithuanian delegation to the IPU,
at the 138th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union**

*Geneva
26 March 2018*

Mr President,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege for me to speak here before you today for several reasons.

This year is special for my country. On 16 February this year, we celebrated the Centenary of the Restoration of the State of Lithuania. On 16 February 1918, the Act of Lithuania's Independence was signed laying the foundations for the establishment of a sovereign state. The sovereignty was, unfortunately, interrupted by the Soviet

occupation in June 1940. We restored our independence only in 1991. In the fateful period between 1939 and 1940, Lithuania, still an independent state, became the epicentre of historic events. Our country hosted around 30 000 refugees of war and its former capital Kaunas could be referred to as the Northern Casablanca. However, when Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940, Lithuanians were forced to seek refuge abroad. **We went through the redrawing of borders on the political map, deportation and many became refugees. This wound remains open for a lifetime. Only political matters make us sometimes forgets its gravity. We must constantly remind ourselves that people rather than interests matter most.**

We strongly hope that this year, the United Nations will make a big step forward by adopting two documents:

- *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*
- *Global Compact on Refugees*

We welcome the international initiative to join the efforts for the introduction of a more effective refugee protection regime, response to refugee situations and prevention measures. We support the decision on the provision of specific actions **to react to refugee situations.**

We approve of the goals and measures to encourage global **burden-sharing.** As a transit country, Lithuania attaches particular importance to **decisions related to ensuring the safety of refugees** and fight against organised crime (human trafficking). It is essential that the document focusses on safety aspects and recognises the responsibility of recipient countries to take action to ensure domestic security.

In order to ensure burden-sharing and solidarity, **the recipient countries have to be provided with comprehensive support.** We appreciate the fact that the Global Compact on Refugees focusses in particular on these aspects. We support the emphasis, in the document,

on the **preparation for crisis situations and coordination on the national, regional and UN levels.**

The **Human rights element** should remain relevant. Special focus should be made on the protection of vulnerable groups, such as women and children, the disabled and the elderly.

However, we must constantly remind ourselves that in order to improve the global refugee situation, global efforts need to be made to first and foremost eliminate the **reasons causing people to flee from their countries and become refugees.** This entails conflict resolution, fight against poverty and human rights violations, and ensuring good governance, the rule of law, and effective institutions. We are glad that the document focusses on this, too.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tomorrow will mark exactly four years (*kalba numatyta sakyti 03 26*) since the UN GA Resolution No 68/262 of 27 March 2014 **affirmed Ukraine's** sovereignty and territorial integrity, condemned Russia's actions as the violation of international law, recognised Crimea as a part of Ukrainian territory and underscored the invalidity of the Crimean "referendum" staged by Russia .

What has changed in the four years? Crimea has been illegitimately occupied and the war in eastern Ukraine has continued ever since. Refugees accounting to 1.5 million people have been fleeing massively from Russian-occupied Crimea and Donbass. All this results in broken human destinies.

We condemn Russia's persecution of Crimean Tatars and we have been raising this issue in all possible formats. Russia is responsible for systematic violations of human rights in the temporarily occupied territories. In 2017, the Seimas (Lithuanian Parliament) adopted a

resolution condemning the ongoing occupation and annexation of Crimea.

We consider unacceptable Russia's deliberate interference with domestic affairs of European countries with a view to creating a climate of mistrust in the public authorities, democracy and our values. All available instruments, including cyber-attacks, the media, social networks, energy, and attempts to incite discord between the nation and ethnic minorities, are used to that end.

We must make continuous efforts to preserve all the sanctions against Russia (political, personal, economic, and related to non-recognition of the annexation of Crimea) until any grounds for their introduction are eliminated completely.

In the centre of Europe today we are facing common **threats resulting from aggressive actions of Russia**

pursuing revisionist goals. It is crucial for **Europe to fully realise the degree of threat posed by Russia.** In the 21st century, Russia is changing the borders on the European map by force and seeking to disrupt western democratic regimes and weaken the transatlantic relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion of my speech, I invite you to take note of the ideas expressed by Pope Francis in his address to the intergovernmental conference in Mexico where he urges, **in response to numerous challenges of modern migration, “to welcome, protect, promote and integrate.”** And in **doing so to be inspired by “compassion, foresight and courage”.**

We must constantly remind ourselves that **people rather than interests matter most.**

Thank you!

