

„GLOBAL LITHUANIA“

REMARKS BY NERIS GERMANAS VICE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

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Honorable Director General,
Distinguished participants,

It is my pleasure to congratulate ambassador William Lacy Swing, on his reelection to the post of International Organization for Migration Director General. We appreciate the significant role of the International Organization for Migration in migrant and refugee relief efforts in Syria and other crisis areas. During a recent visit to Lithuania, the Director General had a series of high-level meetings and fruitful discussions with my country's leadership. We look forward to continuing our constructive relationship.

Diaspora communities make various contributions to their countries of origin and where they reside. Understanding the role of diaspora engagement in development processes, more governments, including my own, are beginning to invest significant effort and capital in engaging the diaspora.

About **1.3 million** people of Lithuanian descent **live outside of Lithuania**. Migration is a fact of life in contemporary society. In Lithuania, it has often been perceived as a threat. Lithuania's Government, business sector and youth associations are encouraging Lithuanian society to view emigration in a new light – not as a threat, but as a challenge, which can be transformed into an opportunity. We need to continue educating our societies about a largely untapped national asset – the diaspora.

In 2010, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania was assigned a new mission: to coordinate implementation of Government diaspora policy. Our **main objective was to**

strengthen State-diaspora ties by promoting diaspora engagement in the life of Lithuania. We mobilized our global network of Lithuanian diplomatic representations in this process of building bridges between the State and diaspora. In public consultations with diaspora groups and experts, we developed a “Global Lithuania” programme, which outlined measures for reaching out to the diaspora. We focused on **Lithuanian communities and organizations, and network-building with Lithuanian professionals abroad.**

In 2012, the Lithuanian Government began implementing the “**Global Lithuania**” programme, which is **based on the idea** that we are one nation united by a common national identity and historical memory. **Regardless of where we live, we can preserve and create our identity and foster political, economic, civic and cultural ties with Lithuania.** Every motivated Lithuanian that wants to stay connected to his homeland, can contribute his or her knowledge, ideas and experience through available mechanisms and instruments that promote collaboration in such areas as trade and investment, scientific and technological innovation, Lithuanian language education, culture and identity, volunteerism, etc.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stresses the importance of getting to know the diaspora and has thus identified two main target groups. We focus on harnessing the power of 1) groups that promote a sense of community and Lithuanian identity, 2) individuals with expertise, contacts and personal commitment to the development of Lithuania. Complex network-building with professionals remains a high priority for us. **The key to success lies in transforming „brain drain“ into „brain circulation“.**

The experience of many countries proves that research on the diaspora is crucial in achieving objectives. We have commissioned polls, surveys and studies about our diaspora. Next year, the Department of Statistics will release new data about our diaspora, based on census results. Some of our most **successful initiatives** were developed on the basis of such research.

For example, business leaders of Lithuania and the diaspora come together at a **World Lithuanian Economic Forum**, which is held annually in a different location. This event draws trade and investment, valuable contacts and expertise from diaspora individuals and companies. **The Global**

Lithuanian Awards recognize the extraordinary achievements of Lithuanians overseas, who excel in their areas of expertise. The event promotes a positive image of the diaspora and the diaspora's present and potential contribution to Lithuania. **Internships and Mentoring Programs**, such as LT Big Brother, Create for Lithuania, Lithuanian International Student Services, are a great investment, which provide an opportunity for students and young professionals to live and work in Lithuania. These programs open doors for their return, provide an enabling environment for applying their practical knowledge and expertise in the public, private and NGO sectors.

But some challenges still remain in the diaspora engagement process. For instance, thirteen government institutions participate in the implementation of the “**Global Lithuania**” programme. Coordination and inter-agency cooperation sometimes is complicated: the level of understanding about the diaspora varies, financial resources are limited, on the other hand diaspora expectations – high.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would like to note that our diasporas are natural ambassadors by identity. As governments, we need to recognize and better utilize their contribution – and not only to their countries of origin. Their skills and knowledge play an important role with the socioeconomic fabric of the country where they reside. They can be positive forces for change, particularly in promoting trade between both countries of origin and destination. Their knowledge and cultural identity has the potential to positively affect relationships between countries. We will continue to cultivate our work with the diaspora and to solicit diaspora engagement through economic, cultural, scientific and educational collaboration, also in the form of ideas and best practices. Lithuania is ready to share its growing expertise in this area with interested countries and other partners. Thank you very much for your attention.