

Address by Loreta Grauzinienė, Speaker of the Seimas, at the Conference

20th Anniversary of the Law on the State Language

Press release, 5 February 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the conference marking 20 years since the adoption of the *Law on the State Language of the Republic of Lithuania*. First of all, I would like to pay due respect to Prof. Zigmantas Zinkevičius who personally contributed to the drafting of the *Law on the State Language* and who turned 90 on 4 January 2015. Apart from being an accomplished linguist with an intimate knowledge of the Baltic languages, Prof. Zinkevičius is a well-known dialectologist, author of textbooks, a public and political activist, an academician, and a citizen of honour of Ukmergė, a town I have deep sentiments about. His contribution to the Lithuanian language is truly invaluable. The exhibition marking Professor's 90th anniversary, opened before the conference, also attests to this fact. Prof. Zinkevičius stood at the helm of the Ministry of Education and Culture at the time of establishment of the working group tasked with drafting the *Law on the State Language*.

I am genuinely happy to see Prof. Zinkevičius in this audience today.

The *Law on the State Language* was both a necessity and a commitment to be fulfilled. The Constitution of Lithuania, adopted by the referendum of 25 October 1992, enshrined the will of the Lithuanian nation that had “preserved its spirit, native language, writing, and customs“. Article 14 of the Constitution stipulates that “Lithuanian shall be the State language.”

The *Law on the State Language* that implements the constitutional provisions clearly represents the declaration of our national identity. It is interesting to note that during the first period of independence of Lithuania, the intellectuals of the time, including Jonas Basanavičius and Antanas Smetona, who made an important impact on our statehood and development of the national identity, took a particular interest in the Lithuanian language, its preservation and development, and highlighted the role of a language as an essential sign of national identity.

Today, the Lithuanian language still needs our combined efforts to thrive.

I am also in favour of putting more emphasis on our dialects. Fewer and fewer young people can speak the local dialects of their native regions. Two years ago, in 2013, we marked the Year of

Dialects. Many interesting and meaningful projects were launched as a result. I hope that similar initiatives designed to take more interest in dialects will be further developed to the benefit of the discovery of the uniqueness of our native land as well as its spoken and cultural heritage.

As I congratulate the Conference participants on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the *Law on the State Language*, and as I highlight the importance of this law to our country, I still hope that it is our national and civil awareness rather than the letter of the law that truly promotes our pride and interest in our language. After all, it was the civil and national awareness developed for over two decades that prompted the drafting of the *Law on the State Language* in the first place.

I hope this will be a fruitful conference full of valuable insights.