Welcome Address by H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of Lithuania, to the Participants of the European Competition Day Conference in Vilnius

Mr. Vice-President of the European Commission, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome all of you in Vilnius on the occasion of the European Competition Day.

Free competition is the driving force of the economy and the main precondition for consumer protection. It gives people the power of choice and helps businesses to excel. However, greed still blinds some managers to breach the EU antitrust legislation – cartels and abuses of dominant market position do still happen. This is what boosts the prices up, kills new ventures and makes well-established businesses stagnate. Unless we do away with it in the EU, our consumers’ choice, our economic freedoms will only be an illusion.

Competition lies at the core of the European Union. The initial aspiration for a vibrant and competitive single market has led to a gradual political and economic integration of 28 member states. This has created a prosperous market of 500 million people, proud of its high-quality products and services, leading innovations and entrepreneurial potential.

So, let us make it very clear – there must be zero tolerance to cartels and other violations of antitrust laws in the EU.– Public interest and benefit of consumers shall be a guiding imperative for every business – from transnational corporations to local artisan shops/small start-ups.

This can only be achieved if we, all 28 countries, act as one. From Helsinki to Madrid, from Dublin to Athens, as European decisions are implemented, no back door should be left open. For example, more competition in the energy sector and independence from dominant gas, electricity and oil suppliers will result in lower prices and make Europe’s economy more competitive in global markets.

In this respect, I do hope that an agreement on the Commission’s proposal for a directive on damages claim will be reached during Lithuania’s Presidency. This
would make infringements even more expensive and unattractive by ensuring that not only fines but also compensations are paid.

International business giants should also play following the European rules of fair competition and offer best value for money to EU citizens. In return, they get access to the vast and profitable EU market.

Regrettably, not only businesses but also public administration entities sometimes do breach principles of fair competition.

Despite the abundance of best practices across Europe, there is no single answer and no best solution regarding the supervision of competition applicable to each and every country. However, the essence remains the same: only truly independent competition authorities can effectively act for the benefit of consumers and businesses – all Europeans.

As a person and as a politician I strongly believe that the spirit of competition was, is and will be a crucial precondition of good life: knowing that a small start-up may compete with a huge multinational inspires and sets a green light to new and great ideas. And that is what I would like to wish you – fruitful discussions leading to great ideas for the benefit of all Europeans.

Thank you for your attention.