

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE 19TH BALTIC COUNCIL

On 29 November 2013 in Riga, Republic of Latvia, the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers convened for the 19th Baltic Council to discuss the current situation in the Baltic energy market and transport sector, development cooperation, creation of a digital single market, combating organised crime, cooperation in the area of research and innovation, as well as to evaluate progress on the joint priorities set for 2013 and to define objectives for 2014.

Lithuania is successfully presiding over the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2013; Latvia will join the euro area on 1 January 2014, and Lithuania has expressed a desire to join the euro area in 2015.

Political and economic dialogue among the Baltic States, as well as regular coordination of positions, helps to boost growth, represent their interests globally and foster sustainable regional development.

The Baltic Council declares the following:

- The Baltic States will continue to work closely within the European Union, thus ensuring more effective protection of joint interests. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania appreciate the cooperation demonstrated in the context of the current and upcoming presidencies of the Baltic States of the Council of the European Union, and they are committed to fostering the mutual exchange of experience and support.
- The Baltic States recognize the significance of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) for the economic, social and territorial cohesion, in addressing common marine and environmental challenges, infrastructure deficiencies, in particular building the missing energy and transport infrastructure links.
- The Baltic States encourage their managing authorities to embed EUSBSR objectives into the programming documents of the 2014-2020 programming period in a coordinated way and introduce possibilities for transnational cooperation in a macro-regional context.
- The Baltic States welcome the joint declaration signed by the ministers for transport of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, as well as Finland and Poland, during the informal meeting of Ministers for Transport held on 16 September 2013 in Vilnius, and the Joint Declaration signed by the Prime Ministers Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers on 8 November 2013 in Riga, which outline further action in establishing the Joint Venture for Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica Project with headquarters in Riga and readiness to draft the shareholder agreement of the joint venture and the derived articles of incorporation of the joint venture by 1 January 2014 as well as seek the CEF

funding in the order of 85% for the Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica Project during the next EU Financial Framework 2014 – 2020 and beyond 2020.

- The Baltic States will continue to implement the Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP) by cooperating on several regional energy infrastructure development projects and using all the possible funding sources including the Connecting Europe Facility.
- The Baltic States welcome the consent to jointly address the issues related to the development of electricity sector of the region (including – 1) common projects of electricity generation, 2) synchronization with the networks of the Continental Europe and 3) operation of electricity market).
- The Baltic States must continue closer cooperation in seeking the most appropriate ways to diversify the natural gas supply in the region.
- The Baltic States should cooperate even more closely in the transfer of experience and knowledge in order to develop and introduce innovative technologies related to renewable energy resources and energy efficiency, as well as to use existing technologies and boost their efficiency towards the promotion of competitive, safe and sustainable low carbon and climate resilient economy.
- Implementing successful Baltic cooperation in the area of research and innovation requires joint and coordinated action aimed at attaining shared objectives. The Baltic experts' groups established pursuant to the Memorandum of Understanding on Closer Co-operation in Higher Education, Research and Innovation are implementing the integration plan for the Baltic regional research area, sharing information on coordinating smart specialisation processes and research infrastructure, as well as analysing the potential for implementation of joint educational/research programmes and introduction of the “Baltic Bonus” scheme that is an additional support for national support schemes for the preparation of “Horizon 2020” proposals or other research and innovation initiatives.
- The Baltic States recognise that sustainable agriculture and rural development promote public goods. The agricultural sector is competitive and has excellent potential for development; it has to become increasingly market-oriented and focused on producing goods with high added value. Therefore, the successful cooperation that has already been established in protecting and pursuing the joint interests in the European Union should be continued. Furthermore, in the context of agriculture and rural development, the Baltic States should develop, whenever possible, a uniform approach towards common export markets, education and training programmes, as well as introduction of new agricultural technologies and know-how.
- The Baltic States will continue developing cooperation mechanisms in the area of tourism, thus increasing their joint competitiveness in the global market. The on-going active cooperation within the framework of the Joint Tourism Committee and the Baltic Marketing Council should be continued.

Concurrently, the Baltic States should jointly take advantage of opportunities presented by their membership in international organisations. The Baltic States are committed to jointly promoting the region as an attractive and diverse tourist destination.

- The Baltic States have to strengthen cooperation in the field of digital signatures and electronic authentication of persons and to promote information exchange in order to develop replicable solutions for cross-border recognition and integration of public services, and thereby facilitate business and other basic freedoms of the European Union – free movement of goods, capital, services and people.
- Active cooperation and coordination of positions regarding the Eastern Partnership has proved its value and will be further pursued after the Eastern Partnership Summit, which takes place in Vilnius during the Lithuanian presidency of the Council of the European Union and which is a significant event for bringing eastern neighbours closer to the European Union.
- The Baltic States should implement agreements concluded with regard to joint health-care projects.

The year 2014 will mark the 25th anniversary of the Baltic Way, which is a significant historic event constituting a part of our collective memory and which should be cherished by the Baltic nations.

The Baltic Council defines the following joint priorities for cooperation in 2014:

- 1) Enhancing cooperation in IT-policy;
- 2) Developing the regional energy market;
- 3) Improving transport infrastructure connections;
- 4) Cohesion with Nordic-Baltic cooperation.

The 20th Baltic Council will be held during the Estonian presidency on October 24, 2014 in Tallinn, Republic of Estonia.

Raimonds Vējonis

President of the Baltic Assembly

Daniels Pavļuts

Minister for Economics of the
Republic of Latvia

Riga, 29 November 2013