

## **JOINT STATEMENT OF THE 30<sup>th</sup> BALTIC COUNCIL**

On 18 October 2024 in Vilnius, the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers convened for the 30<sup>th</sup> Baltic Council to discuss, review and address issues of cooperation among Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in various areas of shared interests, including regional security and defence, energy security, transport infrastructure and our continued support to Ukraine towards its victory.

### **The Baltic Council declares the following:**

#### **Support to Ukraine against Russia's full-scale war of aggression**

The Baltic States reaffirm unwavering support to Ukraine until its victory, based on respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters, as well as for its inherent right of self-defence.

The Baltic States fully support the Peace Formula proposed by President Zelensky as the only viable framework for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine in line with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. As Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania remain among leading supporters of Ukraine in terms of our GDP percentage, we are committed to continue providing Ukraine with all kinds of assistance, including political, military, economic, humanitarian, and diplomatic support.

We will further promote effective and synchronized military aid to Ukraine, including through the European Peace Facility, the EU Military Assistance Mission Ukraine and the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform in Ukraine, NATO Security Assistance, and Training for Ukraine as well as within the IT, Demining and Drone Coalitions under the Ramstein format.

We reiterate our call for enhanced and coordinated support to Ukraine's energy sector, which has been severely impacted by Russia's unlawful and brutal attacks. The Baltic States have already contributed significantly by providing essential energy equipment, and we will continue to explore opportunities for further assistance in collaboration with the private sector, prioritizing Ukraine's most critical needs as it faces what is expected to be the most challenging winter since the onset of Russia's full-scale aggression. Furthermore, we urge EU Member States to accelerate the phase-out of all remaining Russian energy imports, particularly LNG, as these resources

continue to finance Russia's war effort, including its attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure. We look forward to a comprehensive action plan by the new European Commission to address this issue. Our commitment to the protection, repair, and restoration of Ukraine's energy sector remains steadfast in the face of Russia's ongoing aggression.

United in our support to Ukraine, we will contribute to the plan of its recovery and reconstruction, provide all the necessary assistance to increase the absorption capacity of Ukrainian institutions, and coordinate our actions for aid effectiveness. We will make all efforts to assist in delivering impactful reforms in Ukraine and share best practices in the use of innovations and digital solutions to rebuild the country and advance its European integration process.

We remain committed to supporting Ukraine on the path to a full-fledged membership in the European Union, by providing political, expert and other support. We welcome the opening of the accession negotiations in June and look forward to the successful screening process and opening of the first negotiation cluster, followed by all other clusters as soon as possible to expedite the European reforms. Also, recognizing that Ukraine is already contributing to Euro-Atlantic security in line with the Art 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty. It is in NATO's best interest to have Europe's strongest and most combat-experienced army integrated into the Alliance. We continue to support Ukraine on its irreversible path towards the membership and work for a consensus among Allies to extend an invitation for Ukraine to join NATO without a delay. Membership in NATO will be the best security guarantee for Ukraine that would greatly contribute to the Euro-Atlantic security.

The Baltic States strongly condemn the increasing military cooperation of China, North Korea and Iran with Russia, including the recent Iran's transfer of ballistic missiles and related technology to Russia, after having supplied the Russian regime with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which have been used extensively to target civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, apartment blocks, etc. We also condemn the ongoing Belarus regime's support to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In response to this, we call on the Member States of the EU to designate the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization, emphasizing the need for accountability for its role in supporting Russia's war against Ukraine. We are gravely concerned about China's actions such as the supply of dual-use goods and military components, equipment, and raw materials that enable Russia to sustain its brutal and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. China is close to crossing the line of direct military support to Russia, which will affect our relationship. We call on the third parties to cease providing support to Russia's war effort.

We condemn Russia's continued aggressive actions, irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and threats to use nuclear force and the announced deployment of Russian nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus. The latest changes to the official Russian nuclear doctrine proposed by the Kremlin represent further attempts to escalate the security situation. We recall the commitment Belarus made in the Budapest Memorandum to eliminate all nuclear weapons from its territory.

We stress the importance of increasing pressure, including through sanctions, on the Belarusian regime, as it continues violence and repression, jails over 1300 political prisoners, remains accomplice in Russia's aggression against Ukraine and engages in hybrid activities against neighboring countries. Lukashenka's regime is illegitimate and will not be recognized after the next year's sham "elections". We will continue to demand free and fair elections and to release all political prisoners immediately and unconditionally. At the same time, we express our strong support to the Belarusian democratic forces and their pro - European path.

The Baltic States, together with NATO and its Allies, and the EU, are determined to develop a cohesive and comprehensive long-term policy on constraining, contesting and countering Russia's expansionism, deter its aggressive posture and subversive hybrid campaigns. We will continue close cooperation among ourselves and with our partners in this regard.

Since Russia launched its war of aggression against Ukraine, the Baltic States have jointly spearheaded EU sanctions efforts and continue to make substantial proposals for further restrictions. We remain committed to ensuring that further increased collective pressure on Russia remain strong and steady, including through our joint proposals for EU's sanctions packages, targeting Russia's primary revenue drivers and access to defense materials and further swift and substantial sanctions on Russia's accomplices. To reduce the revenues of Russia's war machine and raise the price of aggression until Russia ends its war of aggression against Ukraine and compensates for the damage done. Beyond further sanctions pressure, our focus must also remain on strict and uniform implementation of existing restrictive measures and tackling the circumvention of sanctions. The Baltic States are working together on maximizing the effectiveness of customs control for sensitive items [with battlefield relevance] to reduce Russia's ability to [acquire sensitive technology for its military which allows it to] continue waging war of aggression against Ukraine. We also stress the importance to further efforts to economically isolate Russia and Belarus by increasing tariffs on goods originating in aggressor countries.

We need to maximise our efforts in support of Ukraine in holding Russia's highest political and military leadership accountable, and in establishing an effective Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine. The Tribunal should correspond to expectations of Ukraine and of the international community as a whole, apply international law and enjoy the broadest cross-regional support to guarantee its legitimacy. Moreover, it is also vital to ensure that this tribunal

has the mandate to prosecute and try incumbent head of state, head of government and minister of foreign affairs (the “troika”) who currently enjoy personal immunity. In this context, we welcome the outcome of the conference of the Ministers of Justice of the Council of Europe in Vilnius.

We, as the members of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, will continue to address the illegal deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children by Russia and support efforts for their safe return.

Russia’s military aggression and subversive activities globally go hand in hand with its increasing internal repressions. We will continue our support to Russian civil society, independent media, democratic opposition, anti-corruption, anti-war movements, as well as other critical voices.

### **Regional security and defence matters, including transatlantic relations**

We are working tirelessly together with our Allies towards strengthening NATO deterrence and defence posture. We, the Baltic States, continue to invest more than 3% of GDP into our defence and invite all Allies to increase their defence spending further and to meet the most critical capability requirements. We highly appreciate the Allied long-term commitment and contribution to NATO Enhanced Forward Presence.

We welcome the decisions taken in NATO Summits in Vilnius and Washington, including those related to necessary forces, capabilities, resources, and infrastructure for the new regional defence plans. We call all Allies to speed and scale up the delivery of critical capabilities, such as air defence, long-range fires and ammunition, in order to be able to fully accommodate the regional plans and continue the necessary support to Ukraine. We stress the urgency of transition from air policing to air defence, and the immediate implementation of Rotational Air Defence Model, now included into NATO’s Integrated Air and Missile Defence policy. We are ready to host Allied capabilities in this framework and look forward to the establishment of the air defence rotational schedule as soon as possible. We also call for rapid boosting of NATO’s Baltic Air Policing mission in response to recent NATO’s airspace violations. We remain committed to the development of the best Host Nation Support possible and investing in improved training capacities.

We continue to enhance our regional security and defence cooperation striving to be better equipped to deal with regional security threats and challenges, e.g. through common defence procurements, capability development projects, joint training, military education, and political, security, and military dialogue. We aim to strengthen the regional defence readiness together with partners and allies both in the EU and NATO by closely coordinating defence industrial policies in the EU formats and ensuring full complementarity and coherence with NATO, as well as

advocating for sufficient consideration and financing for Member States/Allies that are most exposed to threats and subversion by Russia and its accomplices.

Protecting the external border of NATO and the EU, the Baltic States have allocated significant national resources for strengthening the external border against conventional military and hybrid threats, which is a common interest and responsibility of Allies and Member States. In both organisations also requiring common funding from the EU and NATO.

Russian hybrid operations on NATO and EU soil are becoming increasingly kinetic and hostile. Constant instances of arson, sabotage, GNSS signal jamming, violation of airspace, along Russian disinformation are aimed to disrupt Western support to Ukraine and to sow public distrust in democratic institutions and processes, as well as to divide societies. We will further bolster our resilience and work within the EU and NATO to develop respective toolboxes to identify, prevent and respond to hybrid threats, thus increasing costs to hybrid actors. We welcome the adoption of the new EU sanctions regime for Russia's destabilising activities and look forward to making the EU Hybrid Rapid Response Teams fully operational. We also look forward to the implementation of NATO Washington Summit's taskings to contain and contest Russia's aggressive actions and to counter its ability to conduct malign destabilizing activities against NATO and Allies. In this regard, we will actively contribute to developing recommendations on NATO's strategic approach to Russia.

Disinformation and propaganda continue to be a central part of Russia's hybrid warfare and its attempts to justify its war of aggression against Ukraine, to exploit social and political tensions, and to undermine democratic processes. The Baltic States will continue to work nationally and regionally, within the EU, NATO and internationally to expose and counter foreign information manipulation and interference. Therefore it is especially important to strengthen independent media and advance media literacy. It is also essential to strengthen the trilateral cooperation among the Baltic States and within the NB8 (Nordic-Baltic cooperation) format in cybersecurity.

The Belarus regime continues to pose threats on the EU eastern external border by instrumentalizing the irregular migration. We will continue close regional cooperation and coordination to ensure the effective response to these hybrid attacks.

### **Regional connectivity and cooperation in climate change mitigation**

The Baltic States are rapidly approaching the finish line in their efforts to synchronize their electricity grid with the continental European network on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2025. This will strengthen the energy security of the whole Baltic region.

We remain committed to implement cross-border infrastructure and cooperation projects to improve key gas interconnections in the Baltic region. Klaipėda LNG terminal, the Gas Interconnection Poland–Lithuania (GIPL), Inčukalns underground gas storage (UGS) in Latvia, Floating Storage Regasification Unit (FSRU) in Paldiski, Estonia, and Finland's Inkoo FSRU, remain vital backup facilities, enhancing flexibility in LNG supply management.

In view of the Balticconnector and data cables' incident in 2023, the Baltic States agree that the protection and resilience of the current and future cross-border critical infrastructure, especially in the maritime domain, must be further bolstered.

All three Baltic States have ambitious targets for renewable energy production for the year 2030 and beyond. Further cooperation can increase both energy security and bring down costs, especially for new connections. We are committed to collaborating among our countries to share expertise, technological advancement, and best practices. In light of the current geopolitical climate, we are compelled to intensify and expedite our collective efforts towards energy transition and the attainment of global climate targets by reducing reliance on fossil fuels remain dedicated to the implementation of greenhouse gas reduction policies, while also ensuring a stable investment environment for renewable energy solutions.

The Baltic States highlight the importance of improving railway passenger connectivity across the region, with links between the Baltic capitals being key to its success. In this context, we welcome the launch of the regular Vilnius-Riga train service in 2023 as well as the prospective Tartu-Riga train service at the earliest opportunity.

Given new geopolitical reality, the Baltic States view the swift implementation of the Rail Baltica and Via Baltica projects as critical for deterrence and security of the region. The Baltic States reiterate the urgency of completing these projects as soon as possible. All efforts shall be dedicated ensuring the necessary financing.

The Baltic States also remain united in their commitment to achieving climate neutrality by 2050, recognizing that climate change is one of the most urgent challenges of our era. This requires a profound transformation of economies and societies. Regional cooperation is crucial to meet these ambitious climate targets while enhancing competitiveness across the Baltic region. Moreover, we acknowledge that biodiversity loss and global warming are interconnected aspects of the current environmental crisis, both of which must be addressed together.

The Baltic States have successfully collaborated during the development of the National Energy and Climate Plans that provide a useful ground for implementing climate mitigation measures in a more coordinated and effective way.

The urgency and importance of the development of current and future transport infrastructure projects, especially those that respond to military mobility goals, significantly

increase funding requirements within the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework while also forcing the Baltic States to find financing alternatives.

We have to actively explore and embrace alternative sources and instruments, including loans and public-private partnerships, to supplement public funding for transport infrastructure.

The EU should put more efforts to develop adequate instruments to ensure bridge financing and transition between existing funds and different multiannual financial frameworks with the aim to provide continuity in the longer term and facilitate implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects.

The Baltic States see the EU Single Market as essential for Europe's competitiveness and resilience. We are committed to work further on removing the remaining barriers in the single market, especially in guaranteeing the freedom of services.

### **European Union**

The Baltic States fully commit to effectively addressing all migratory issues and ensuring the security of EU's external border. The coordination on the EU level to address these issues is crucial, especially in managing the external dimension of migration where we encourage the EU to ramp up its efforts. The recent adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum is a welcome step in strengthening EU law to better manage migration and asylum.

The Baltic States continue to firmly support EU enlargement which has proved to be among the most successful EU policies and efficient transformative instrument. Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine shows that enlargement is a strategic priority. We seek a steady, predictable and merit-based process of enlargement with the aim that accession countries will become full-fledged members of the EU.

The EU is faced with unprecedented challenges, goals and ambitions and the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2028-2034 will be essential for effectively addressing all of them. The Baltic States believe that subsidiarity, additionality, efficiency and added value should be the governing principles for the future EU budget. However, the list of current priorities cannot be appropriately tackled without increasing the EU budget. In the negotiations of the forthcoming MFF, we will coordinate efforts so that there is enough funding for our common priorities, both traditional (cohesion, CAP, regional projects, including Rail Baltica) and geopolitical like the support to Ukraine and EU enlargement, strengthening EU's security and defence and military mobility. Also, special attention should be paid to building strong and resilient EU Regions bordering aggressor countries.

We advocate for a fair transition to carbon-free economy that enhances global competitiveness and energy sovereignty, focusing on clean, affordable energy through

electrification and grid investments. We also aim to build a circular, resource-efficient economy with clean technologies and smart mobility to improve living standards across the EU.

The Baltic States see the EU Single Market as essential for Europe's competitiveness and resilience. We are committed to work further on removing the remaining barriers in the single market, especially in guaranteeing the freedom of services.

Recognizing the importance of amplifying the collective voice of the Baltic States, we are committed to working together on issues of common interest within the EU, ensuring regular information exchange and coordination of positions, thus strengthening our trilateral cooperation within the EU.

### **Cooperation in the field of culture, education and science**

The Programme of Cultural Cooperation for 2023-2026, signed in 2022, is a guiding document to further strengthen links and develop Baltic cooperation in various fields of culture.

The Song and Dance Festival tradition is one of the strongest traditions, uniting the Baltic region. In 2024, representatives of the Baltic States joined together to celebrate the centenary of this tradition in Lithuania, and Estonia is preparing for the Song and Dance Celebration in 2025. The Baltic States are working together to safeguard the continuation and development of the Song and Dance movement to maintain the value and symbolic significance of this tradition in all three Baltic States.

The Baltic Way, which has been inscribed into the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, is of particular importance to the culture of all three Baltic States and is a unique symbol of the culture and freedom of the Baltic region. This year, the Baltic Way celebrated its 35th anniversary with a series of events in all the Baltic capitals with a special highlight, the large-scale concert "650 kilometres of Freedom" in Vilnius.

The Baltic Culture Fund, led by Lithuania in the period of 2025-2027, has a strong impact on joint cultural projects, providing an opportunity for culture professionals from various fields to cooperate and represent our countries outside the Baltic States. In 2024 six projects were supported in the fields of performing arts, music, visual arts and design, among them "Baltic Circus on the Road" in 2024-2025, Baltic focuses on the Milan Design Week and Ireland Music Week in 2025. The "Baltic Take Over" project continues to promote Baltic contemporary dance scene internationally, and the international "Baltic Visual Theatre Showcase" every two years is organized in the Baltic countries, complemented by lectures and discussions. However, there is a need in the future to evaluate the work of the Baltic Culture Fund and based on the results of evaluation, where it is necessary adapt it to better align with the evolving needs of cultural cooperation within the region.



Cooperation between the Baltic States in the field of film has also been strong and developing fast in recent years. Baltic Film Festivals were held in cooperation of film institutes and film centres and embassies in New York City (7th edition), Boston, London and Oslo. The first Baltic Film Festival in Paris will take place in 2025. In the Baltic States, cooperation takes place within the framework of the Baltic Film Days, an initiative of the National Film Institutions.

There is also close cooperation in the field of museums, where the international further education project Baltic School of Museology takes place on a rotating basis in each of the Baltic States. A biennial Summer Seminar of the National Libraries of the Baltic States has been held to strengthen cooperation in the library field.

In the framework of the Lviv Declaration adopted in June 2022, the Baltic States are actively promoting support for the Ukrainian media and cultural heritage sectors at the national level as well as in the framework of the EU's Creative Europe programme. In 2024, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania contributed to the European Solidarity Fund for Ukrainian Films.

The Baltic States were among the most active promoters of the international conference "Towards the Recovery of the Culture Sector of Ukraine" held in Vilnius in June 2024, which highlighted the importance of the culture sector for reconstructing Ukraine after war.

The Baltic States support direct cooperation between their educational institutions. One of the most successful international instruments for enhancing this cooperation is the Nordic-Baltic program, Nordplus, which aims to establish a Nordic-Baltic educational region, develop and disseminate innovative products and processes in education, and contribute to the improvement of quality and innovation in educational systems. Educational institutions from the Baltic States are among the most active participants in the current program period (2023-2027), and we expect continuous successful Baltic-Nordic partnerships in the future. Positive developments are Baltic cooperation with the Nordic countries in NordForsk (NF) joint programs. The Baltic Research Programme (BRP) has improved and strengthened international collaboration between researchers and research organisations. We highlight the discussions on strengthening cooperation in education and science that have taken place in various Baltic cooperation formats, and also recognize the need to further strengthen cooperation in education and research, one initiative worth further exploring being the establishment of a Baltic Science Fund focusing on thematic research programmes in social sciences and humanities outside the scope of existing international programmes.

The Baltic Council has defined the following priorities for cooperation in 2025:

1. Regional security and resilience.
2. Support to Ukraine.

3. Improving regional connectivity, strengthening energy security, attracting investment.

The 31st Baltic Council will be held during the Latvian Presidency on 14 November 2025 in Riga, the Republic of Latvia.

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