

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE 29th BALTIC COUNCIL

On 24 November 2023 in Tallinn, the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers convened for the 29th Baltic Council to discuss and review progress of cooperation in regional security and defence, energy security and security of its supply and our continued support to Ukraine towards its victory.

The Baltic Council declares the following:

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

Since 24 February 2022, due to Russia's brutal, unjustified and unprovoked full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, we live in a more unpredictable global security environment. We condemn in the strongest terms Russia's invasion of sovereign territory of Ukraine, which is a grave violation of international law, including the UN Charter. Russia remains the most significant and direct threat both to Euro-Atlantic security, and to the norms and principles underlying the rules-based international order.

The Baltic States remain steadfast in their resolve and determination to support Ukraine until its victory. We once again call on Russia to stop this illegal war of aggression, and immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw its forces, equipment and any military or irregular armed units which may be directed or supported by it, as well as any organizations and persons which may be subject to its control or direction from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We urge all countries, in particular Belarus, to cease its complicity and cooperation with Russia, to stop its malign activities against its neighbours, and to return to compliance with international law.

Russia's illegal seizure of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant and blatant violations of its safety requirements endangers the region and beyond. We support the IAEA's presence at the Nuclear Power Plant and its efforts to foster safe and secure operation of nuclear facilities in Ukraine. We urge Russia immediately and completely withdraw all its armed forces, military equipment and personnel from the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, and to return control to Ukraine. And we call for bringing Russia and everyone responsible for this to account.

We remain deeply concerned about Russia's irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and Russia's announcements to deploy nuclear weapons and nuclear-capable systems on the territory of Belarus.

Support for Ukraine

The Baltic States reaffirm their unwavering support to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. Ukraine has the right to defend its territories, and we remain steadfast in our resolve and determination to continue supporting Ukraine in this regard until its victory.

Ukraine continues to fight for its independence, but also for the security of all Europe. Ukraine's clear victory and Russia's clear strategic defeat is a prerequisite to ensuring lasting peace and security in Europe. We reiterate to all Allies and partners the importance of ensuring sustainable long-term international political, military, economic and humanitarian support to Ukraine. The Baltic States, having joined the G7 Declaration of Support for Ukraine, will work with Ukraine within this multilateral framework to establish security commitments and arrangements that

would help Ukraine win this war as soon as possible, support its economic stability and reconstruction, resilience, reform agenda and advance its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will continue to support Ukraine on its path to join NATO as soon as conditions allow. Ukraine has proven its readiness to further our shared principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law, as well as to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area. We will work closely with Ukraine on its way to EU membership. The Baltic States welcome the recommendation of the European Commission to open EU accession negotiations with Ukraine. We look forward to a positive decision of the European Council in December 2023. A strong, independent and prosperous Ukraine that is fully anchored in the Euro-Atlantic family is essential for European security.

The Baltic States support the Peace Formula by President Zelenskyy. It is the Baltic States' firm belief that it is only Ukraine that should set the conditions for ending the conflict, and that the aggressor shall be held responsible, according to international law.

Russia bears full responsibility for its war of aggression against Ukraine, for which it will be held fully accountable. All those responsible for the bombings of civilian and critical infrastructure, the ecocide, including following the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam and other most serious crimes under international law, including the crime of genocide, committed by the Russian Armed Forces against the people of Ukraine, will also be brought to justice for their actions.

The Baltic States will continue to provide Ukraine with military, economic, humanitarian and political assistance. We are making an effort to promote effective and synchronized military aid to Ukraine, including through the European Peace Facility, the EU ammunition initiative and the EU Military assistance mission Ukraine. We support the EU Advisory mission for civilian security sector reform in Ukraine. We contribute in repairing the damage done by Russia's attacks on Ukraine's infrastructure, schools and kindergartens, help those Ukrainians that have chosen our countries as refuge from the war and provide humanitarian assistance to those most in need in Ukraine. The governments and people of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania have donated food, medical products, devices and equipment, ambulances and other vehicles, equipment for rescue and firefighting, and clothing to Ukraine. It is our obligation to continue supporting Ukraine's energy sector and to adhere the most urgent needs in the view of the upcoming winter. We will continue providing assistance for humanitarian demining. We are united in our support to Ukraine and we are ready to contribute to the plan of recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine, as well as to provide all the necessary assistance to increase absorption capacity of Ukrainian institutions, and coordinate our actions for aid effectiveness. We will make all efforts in sharing innovative and impactful ways on how to implement reforms in Ukraine to rebuild the country and advance its European Integration process.

The Baltic States will also use all the relevant international organisations and fora they are members of to gather political and practical support for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction, especially those where a Baltic country has a leadership role, including through the Three Seas Initiative and the International Transport Forum of OECD.

Sanctions against Russia and accountability

Throughout the war of aggression, the Baltic States have jointly spearheaded the EU's sanctions against Russia and continue to make substantive proposals for further restrictions. To date, the EU has adopted eleven sanctions packages that cover all major sectors of the Russian economy. We remain determined to further increase collective pressure on Russia, including through further swift and stronger sanctions, to end its war of aggression. Beyond further sanctions, our

focus must also remain on strict enforcement of existing sanctions and tackling the circumvention of sanctions. Sanctioned goods must not reach Russia and Russia's revenues must be targeted to tackle its ability to continue the brutal war of aggression against Ukraine.

The Baltic States are working together towards regional uniform sanctions implementation where our unified efforts are essential to disrupt Russia's military capabilities and close any remaining loopholes that malign actors seek to exploit. It is our joint responsibility to ensure that we keep increasing pressure on Russia, therefore we have put forward our proposals for the twelfth package of EU's sanctions and will continue working closely in this regard. The effect of sanctions accumulate and they will have a long-term negative impact on Russia's economy.

Russian armed forces and other representatives have committed widespread and systematic violation of international law in Ukraine. Deliberate attacks against civilian population and infrastructure are commonplace; civilians, including children are detained, mistreated, and often deported to Russia or the territories under Russia's occupation; the economy, and critical infrastructure and services are targeted in order to put heavy pressure on Ukraine and its people. No surprise that Ukraine's prosecution has already initiated over 109 000 investigations into war crimes – a workload for several decades and generations. We commend that our national prosecution services have also opened investigations regarding the international crimes committed in Ukraine under rule of universal jurisdiction and co-operating closely in the context of the Joint Investigation Team as well as the International Centre for Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression, whose establishment is strongly welcomed.

The Baltic States welcome that the International Criminal Court (ICC) has taken an active role in investigating international crimes in Ukraine. The issuance of international arrest warrants against Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, Commissioner for Children's Rights, for their part in the deportation of the Ukrainian children to Russia is commendable. We urge the ICC to continue its efforts, and to bring the perpetrators of the most serious crimes to justice, since deportation of children is only one of many crimes committed in Ukraine by Russia.

We strongly condemn the recent cyberattacks against the ICC, and the restrictive measures announced by Russia against the President, the Prosecutor and several judges of the ICC. These measures constitute an attempt to obstruct ICC's investigations, and it is a direct attack against the independence and impartiality of the ICC. The Baltic States call the States Parties to the Rome Statute to remain united in defending and supporting the ICC. Russia's aggression must lead to comprehensive accountability. The ICC has jurisdiction over the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, but cannot exercise jurisdiction over the crime of aggression against Ukraine. We need to continue our efforts to support Ukraine in holding Russia's political and military leadership accountable, and to establish a Special International Tribunal for the crime of aggression with the broadest cross-regional support and legitimacy. It is vital that the tribunal can prosecute incumbent head of state, head of government and minister of foreign affairs (the "troika") who enjoy personal immunity. No one should be able to hide behind immunity to commit atrocities.

The Baltic States believe that it is critical to strengthen ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression with the objective of bringing ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression into line with ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Russia must compensate all damages caused by its war of aggression against Ukraine. The cost of war has been enormous for Ukraine and continues to grow. The continuing support of Ukraine by the international community is crucial, but the ultimate responsibility rests on Russia. We welcome that the Register of Damage for Ukraine has started to operate, and that anyone who has suffered damages can eventually submit a claim. But we cannot stop here, and in order to

come a full circle, we must proceed with establishing the next elements of the comprehensive compensation mechanism – claims commission and compensation fund. We believe that one of the preconditions for lifting sanctions after the aggression is that Russia has compensated all damages caused in Ukraine. Meanwhile, we call on the High Representative and the European Commission to accelerate work with a view to submitting proposals to use immobilized assets to pay for the damages and reconstruction of Ukraine. We should also strive to seek for possibilities to use frozen assets for the damages and reconstruction of Ukraine.

International isolation of the aggressor Russia and its accomplice Belarus must be further strengthened. The Baltic States will continue their close cooperation, including with Ukraine and other partners, on the matter. Until this aggression is over and justice is ensured, both Russia and Belarus shall find themselves as pariahs of the international fora.

Regional security and defence matters, including transatlantic relations

All three Baltic States continue to invest more than 2% of GDP into our defence. We work tirelessly together with the Allies towards strengthening the Allied deterrence and defence posture in the Baltic States and the adaptation towards forward defence. We highly appreciate the long-term commitment of our enhanced Forward Presence framework nations and contributing nations. A strong and enduring transatlantic bond remains crucial for the security of the Euro-Atlantic area, and to the credibility of NATO's collective defence with protection of every inch of Allied territory in its core.

We welcome the adoption of the new regional defence plans at the Vilnius Summit, and continue to work together with the Allies to ensure full executability of these plans. We are also looking forward to the immediate implementation of NATO's Air and Missile Defence Rotational Model in the Baltic States and we are ready to host Allies in this framework. We remain committed to the development of the best Host Nation Support possible, and investing into improved training capacities.

We continue to enhance our regional security and defence cooperation to be better equipped for various regional security challenges, e.g. through common defence procurements, capability development projects, joint training, military education, and political, security, and military dialogue.

We continue to contribute to the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force in order to further bolster our collective deterrence and defence posture in the Baltic Sea region. We welcome the development of Joint Response options, in complementarity to NATO, that will increase our collective capability to address military threats and deter malign actions.

We value NATO's open-door policy, which has significantly contributed to the security and stability of our countries and the whole Euro-Atlantic area. We recall the principle enshrined in the Article 10 of the Washington Treaty affirming that NATO's door remains open to all European democracies that share our values and are willing to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and whose membership contributes to our common security. Therefore, we welcome Finland's accession to NATO in April and call on Türkiye and Hungary to ratify Sweden's accession protocol without further delay. We look forward to enhanced security and defence cooperation with the Nordic countries, including in the Nordic-Baltic framework, as well as strengthening our regional security.

Ukraine has our full support for the right to choose its own security arrangements. We welcome the strong package of support for Ukraine agreed at Vilnius Summit, especially Allied consensus that Ukraine's future is in NATO. Ukraine has proven its readiness to further our shared principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law, as well as to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area. We look forward to welcoming the adapted Annual National

Programme, which we expect to be presented at NATO-Ukraine Council session on Foreign Ministers' level on 29th November this year. We remain committed to contributing to key democratic and security sector reforms based on adapted ANP and required for achieving full interoperability with NATO that would lead the way to Ukraine's NATO accession. We expect the Alliance to regularly assess Ukraine's progress and see the Washington Summit as an important milestone on this path. We will continue our steadfast support for Ukraine on its path to join the Alliance as soon as possible.

Celebrating 20-year membership as Allies in NATO next spring, we shall continue to cooperate for making the upcoming NATO anniversary Summit in Washington a success, projecting Allied unity and resolve to strengthen the Alliance, to defend and protect, and to be able to respond and adapt to emerging security challenges.

Recent incidents concerning critical underwater infrastructure in the Baltic Sea indicate our vulnerability in this area. We are determined to carry out thorough investigation of the incidents, in cooperation with the concerned countries in the region, and to take necessary measures demonstrating our vigilance both nationally and as an Alliance. We have taken measures to enhance the protection of our critical infrastructure through increasing the presence of vessels and aircrafts in the locations of critical undersea infrastructure. We need to demonstrate vigilance and remain committed to preparing for, deterring, and defending against hostile attacks on Allies critical infrastructure. Developing a common situational awareness and supporting and learning from each other, also in the EU and NATO formats, including fully utilizing all available instruments, is therefore essential.

Hybrid threats and cyber security

Hybrid threats such as information manipulation, malicious cyber activities and economic coercion, used as part of broader hybrid attacks and campaigns pose serious threats to national and international security and societal stability. We must continue to improve our resilience and decrease our vulnerabilities and dependencies on authoritarian regimes. We must do it together striving for closer cooperation, more regular exchange of information and better coordination of activities.

Disinformation and propaganda are a central part of Russia's hybrid warfare and its attempts to gain support for its war of aggression against Ukraine. The Baltic States will continue to work nationally, within the EU and internationally to expose and counter foreign information manipulation and interference, as well as strengthen independent media and advance media literacy.

In particular, the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has showcased how cyber operations are employed to support military objectives and have become part of modern armed conflict. Threats in the use of ICT have evolved and intensified, underlining the increasing concerns for national and international security. Malicious cyber incidents may bring along negative effects on economic and social development, target critical infrastructure as well as result in direct implications for international stability. It is crucial to continue enhancing the resilience of our ICT systems and strengthen the information exchange mechanisms that allow us to react and adapt quickly.

We will focus on further cooperation to broaden the EU's sanctions against Russia's actors engaging in foreign manipulation and interference activities as well as to ensure greater impact of restrictions in place to continue to raise the cost of aggression for Russia. The EU Digital Services Act and strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation should play a central role in engaging with social media platforms and giving them more responsibility and accountability to effectively reduce the spread of disinformation.

Regional energy projects, connectivity and climate change mitigation

For the Baltic States, cross-border infrastructure and cooperation remains at the core of the regional energy policy. The work on improving key gas and electricity interconnections in the Baltic region continues, gradually alleviating the situation with existing gas and electricity transmission bottlenecks on state and regional borders. The Gas Interconnection Poland–Lithuania project was finished and went into operation in May 2022, connecting Baltic and Finland gas systems to central-Europe. In Inkoo, Finland, the second LNG terminal (in the form of Floating Storage Regasification Unit; FSRU) of the Baltic-Finnish region was opened at the end of 2022 which together with Klaipėda LNG terminal helps to cover LNG demand of the whole region - no gas import from Russia is needed. The Klaipėda LNG terminal currently operates at its full capacity, ensuring gas supply and increasing energy security of the whole region. Additionally, FSRU reception capacity was built to Paldiski, Estonia, which could take in additional FSRU (LNG terminal) if region should need one. Paldiski serves as an emergency port for the current FSRU in Inkoo. This approach further secures the gas security of the region and allows to be better prepared for the unexpected. Other projects, including the modernization of the region's only underground gas storage facility in Inčukalns also helps to increase the energy independence of the Baltic States. The Baltic States have banned Russian natural gas and LNG imports from 1 January 2023, and actual gas deliveries from Russia were already mostly finished before the end of 2022. The Baltic States remain concerned about continued Russian energy flows to the EU, namely LNG, and we support phasing out all Russian energy imports as soon as possible.

The Baltic States continue advancing synchronization of the Baltic electricity grid with the continental European network to strengthen their energy security and facilitate the desynchronization from the Russian-led Integrated Power System/United Power System (IPS/UPS) grid. In the summer of 2023, the Baltic States reached an agreement to achieve synchronization on an accelerated timeline, no later than February 2025. The process is progressing as planned, and the project is on track for completion by the target date in 2025. Electricity transmission system operators of the Baltic States implementing the project – Latvian JSC Augstsprieguma tīkls, Lithuanian Litgrid AB, and Estonian Elering AS – remain committed to carry out the synchronization smoothly in the spirit of solidarity together with active cross-border cooperation.

The Baltic States share the goal of becoming climate-neutral by 2050. Climate change and the implementation of green transition remain the most pressing challenges of our time requiring the transformation of economies and societies. Cooperation of the Baltic States is vital in achieving the ambitious climate goals and increasing regional competitiveness. We also recognize that climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are manifestations of the triple crisis and need to be treated together.

The current geopolitical situation pushes us to redouble, accelerate, and join our efforts towards energy transition and reaching global climate goals by reducing the dependency on fossil resources. We are committed to continue exchange of experience and expertise with regard to implementation of policies to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, ensuring investment certainty for renewable solutions. The Baltic States must act to connect countries, regions and local communities in order to foster fair competition, ensure the exchange of technology, know-how and skills as well as flexibility within the emerging system. Flexible smart grids, nodal inflows of energy and stable connectivity will ensure that the green transition is efficient, swift and inclusive, generating sustainable solutions and a market-based carbon-free future for Europe. The Baltic States stand for green and digital transition that fosters new business models and

consumer engagement as well as promoting eco-friendly digital technologies by default to contribute to net zero targets and mitigating climate change.

The Baltic States reaffirm their commitment to increase cooperation in offshore wind development, aggregate goals for offshore wind generation and common grid planning, as stated in the Marienborg Declaration and reaffirmed in a non-binding agreement in the BEMIP format. The Baltic States call for strengthened cooperation at the political level among the Member States around the Baltic Sea regarding energy security, including by accelerating renewable energy supply. The cooperation shall be an integral part of the Baltic energy market interconnection plan (BEMIP), which should carry out the necessary work as soon as possible. The Estonian-Latvian joint offshore wind and grid project, ELWIND, is a good example of cross-border offshore wind development, which should be emulated in the entire region. We also welcome the Baltic Wind Connector project, which has the potential of connecting offshore wind farms in the Baltic States with Germany, providing opportunities for green energy exports for our countries. Additionally, the Baltic States value the progress towards the development of the Nordic-Baltic Hydrogen Corridor, especially, its inclusion in the draft of the 6th list of energy Projects of Common Interest (PCI) as just adopted by the EU high-level Decision-Making Body.

The Balticconnector gas pipeline and a back-up data cable, both linking Estonia and Finland, were recently damaged. This is the second time in just over a year, when critical infrastructure in the EU has been disrupted. The Baltic States acknowledge the importance to enhance resilience and protection of critical infrastructure, including those in maritime domain. The Baltic States recognize the need to deepen regional cooperation enabling strengthening protection and resilience of the infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. The Baltic States support discussing in the EU potential technical measures how to enhance the resilience of critical undersea infrastructure, including joint stockpiling certain critical components for repair works, and examining crisis procedures and overall preparedness at critical facilities. Despite the Balticconnector pipeline between Estonia and Finland not operating, the Baltic-Finnish gas market remains sufficiently supplied with gas, which proves the importance of diversified energy sources and supply routes.

We remain committed to supporting the energy sector in Ukraine through both urgent energy assistance for repair works as well as longer term measures, including the full integration of Ukraine with the EU energy market.

Development of transport infrastructure

Construction and funding of key transport projects

As a matter of security for the Baltic States and the Baltic Sea region in the current geopolitical situation, the Baltic States reconfirm the urgent need to ensure the fastest possible implementation of the Rail Baltica and Via Baltica projects.

We reaffirm our full commitment to the delivery of Rail Baltica that will create a new economic corridor essential for the efficient functioning of the Single Market, regional and national transport, cohesion, environment and innovation policies as well as the European Green Deal and military mobility.

We welcome the plan of completing Via Baltica highway between Kaunas and Warsaw by 2024, and reconfirm the importance of continuing the construction of Via Baltica between Kaunas, Riga, and Tallinn in accordance with the TEN-T standards by 2030.

We are pleased to acknowledge that despite the turbulent times the Rail Baltica project has made significant progress in all three Baltic States. The construction has already started in all Baltic States. All three Baltic States continue concentrating their efforts to accelerate the ongoing but delayed preparatory works with the objective to strive to prepare all sections of the project by the

end of 2024 to start the construction in all sections in 2025. This goal is key to achieve the main target – completion of a functioning railway north-south mainline axis in 2030.

The Baltic States reconfirm the importance of ensuring the digital component and 5G coverage in the TEN-T Transport Corridors “Via Baltica” and “Rail Baltica”. Therefore, we are determined to continue to work closely together and with other stakeholders (telco operators, road administrations, etc.) in order to ensure the successful implementation of a cross-border 5G transport corridor.

Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has had negative effects on the construction sector and construction prices in our region. Rail Baltica is not immune to investment cost increase given the extraordinary situation. Our common goal is to speed up the construction of an interoperable railway mainline connecting the three Baltic States with each other and with Central Europe and Finland. Accordingly, increasing the maturity of the project and demonstrating the progress of the construction phase are the key criteria to ensure the necessary financial support in the future.

The Baltic States emphasize that an uninterrupted and predictable financial flow remains of vital importance in the context of starting a large-scale construction phase allowing to deliver on agreements and enabling its strategic as well as economic use. Our three countries will jointly seek further EU’s financial support and opportunities in our national budgets for the delivery of Rail Baltica as a project of significantly increased strategic importance to the region and the EU, and the Euro-Atlantic community. We are optimistic that Connecting Europe Facility’s (CEF) financial support in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will prove sufficient to complete Rail Baltica, taking into account the progress made in the mainline construction activities with the absorption of the CEF funds already committed.

The Baltic States underline the importance of the synergies between defence and transport infrastructure development. We value the allocations from the CEF Military Mobility envelope, stressing that only by enhancing regional military mobility capabilities the region will be able to face a potential outside threat. Taking note, however, that the Military Mobility fund of the CEF under the current MFF (2021-2027) has been almost fully committed to important projects, we call for additional EU financing to be sought for military mobility projects in addition to the already planned CEF transport budget lines to ensure our readiness for effective military mobility operations of critical importance in crisis.

Strategic developments of the Baltic railway sector

The Baltic States are united in their readiness to search for necessary solutions to implement a railway operational model adapted to the Baltic region, based on EU railway standards, best international practices and harmonized with broad gauge specifics, thus ensuring technological, operational and IT independence from the Russian and Belarusian impact.

The Baltic States stress the need to take preparatory steps for transformation of the Baltic railway network from 1520 mm to the European 1435 mm standard after the completion of Rail Baltica project. The transition is a strategic and security imperative for the Baltic States, EU, and NATO. We urge the relevant ministries to consider the preparation of the common Baltic region plan to coordinate the Baltic approach, after having conducted pre-assessments on a country basis for such a transformation to ensure a smooth and coordinated transition towards the European gauge railway standards in the region.

Railway passenger connectivity between the Baltic capitals

The Baltic States stress the need to promote the railway passenger connectivity in the Baltic States and see connection of Baltic capitals as key elements of success, therefore welcome the

launch of the regular train services - Vilnius-Riga in 2023 and Tartu-Riga in 2024. In addition, we confirm the necessity to prepare for the future Rail Baltica passenger operations by introducing passenger train Vilnius-Riga-Tallinn services on the existing railway network in the Baltic region.

Development of the Baltic Route towards Ukraine

The Baltic States underline the importance of the cooperation with Poland and the European Commission on ensuring alternative trade routes and “green lanes” for Ukraine via Baltic ports. Referring to the written addresses of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to the European Parliament of 14 April 2023 and Deputy Prime Minister for Restoration of Ukraine to the European Commission of 22 September 2023, we support the consideration of proposal to include the direct transportation line via the northernmost EU-Ukraine border crossing of Yagodyn-Dorohusk into corridors of the updated TEN-T, without prejudice to the priority implementation of the Rail Baltica North-South axis. The new logistic line connecting the Baltic ports to Ukraine currently provides for the shortest possible route between Ukraine and the Baltic States and allows for ensuring additional transit capacities and addressing the handling and storage supply of the ports in all Baltic States. At the same time the line allows for employing Rail Baltica in the Baltic States – Ukraine connectivity.

The Baltic States recognise the importance of joint activities and operational measures for development of the Baltic Route, i.e. reduction of downtown time on Ukrainian-Polish border for Ukrainian agriculture products transiting to the Baltic ports, allocation of the regular schedule for shuttle trains via Poland and securing a relevant amount of Ukrainian grain and agriculture products needed for viability of the Route.

Belarus

The Baltic States are united in our condemnation of ongoing human rights violations and abuses by the Lukashenka’s regime, particularly aggravated following the fraudulent presidential elections in August 2020. Since then, Belarus has become a threat of international scale. The Minsk regime is a willing accomplice in Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. As the Lukashenka’s regime is increasingly dependent on Russia, the future of Belarus will largely depend on the outcome of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. Belarus continues using tools of hybrid warfare targeting the Baltic region and Europe as a whole. Therefore, the Baltic States stand firmly in support of the regime’s continued international isolation, consistently strengthened and fully mirrored restrictive measures (without derogations for potash fertilisers), full international accountability of its leaders (including with regard to deportation of Ukrainian children), and call for unconditional release of all political prisoners, as well as organisation of free and democratic elections. Only a democratic Belarus would guarantee peace and stability in the region. The Baltic States consider it of utmost importance to empower the Belarus’s democratic forces led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. We believe that a free, sovereign and democratic Belarus, which respects fundamental democratic freedoms and human rights of its citizens and adheres to international law, is in the best interest of the people of Belarus as well as of Europe as a whole.

Nuclear and environmental safety

The Baltic States wish to emphasize their ongoing and unwavering concern regarding the Russian-built Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) located near the border of the EU. Belarus has initiated commercial operation of the Unit 2 of the Belarusian NPP, despite not providing the solution of nuclear safety issues, so demonstrating a disregard for international safety standards and recommendations. We are also very concerned about the lack of information from the Belarusian authorities about the repeated disconnection of Belarusian NPP power units from the

power grid, which was potentially caused by equipment or system failures, and we have not received information whether this has increased the risk of radiation. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, once again, urge Belarus to take all necessary steps to resolve all safety issues and comply with the international nuclear and environmental safety regulations and recommendations provided by the international experts without any further delay. We call upon the international community and the European Commission to maintain a vigilant focus on Belarus NPP regarding enforcement of highest safety standards at Belarusian NPP.

Eastern Partnership

The Baltic States reaffirm their support for an active EU engagement in the Eastern Neighbourhood. The Eastern Partnership has demonstrated its value through supporting EU integration processes of individual Eastern Partnership countries, strengthening democratic reforms in the region, boosting economic cooperation and strengthening security and resilience of the partner countries against variety of pressures, including those emanating from the aggressive policy of Russia. Through closer cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries, we are strengthening democracy and the rule of law in the region. We must continue our work to help the Eastern Partnership countries improve the security, resilience, and stability in the region. The 23 June 2022 decision of the European Council to grant the EU candidate country status to Ukraine and Moldova, and the European perspective to Georgia, was the greatest achievement and success of the Eastern Partnership policy and proved its strategic ambitious and transformative power. The full-fledged EU membership of associated Eastern Partnership countries is the greatest investment to long-term security we can provide, and it remains among our key objectives. We commend the considerable progress Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have made on their paths towards the EU. We welcome the historic 2023 Enlargement Package by the European Commission and look forward for the respective decisions to be taken by the European Council in December 2023. The Baltic States have consistently provided expert assistance and support to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and are committed to continue cooperation in achieving the goal of their membership in the EU. We consider the Eastern Partnership as a complementary tool deepening the European integration and motivating partners to continue reform processes. The Baltic States strongly support the EU efforts in seeking a peaceful, sustainable, and comprehensive negotiated resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Against this backdrop, we must enhance Armenia's resilience and help to address the threats to its stability, sovereignty, territorial integrity and democratic development by providing all the necessary political, humanitarian, economic and security-related support. The Eastern Partnership remains an important platform for the EU engagement and support for Belarus civil society and independent media. In light of the upcoming EU institutional cycle and the 15th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership, both in 2024, and with a view to 2030 target for the completion of the EU enlargement process set by President of the European Council Ch. Michel, we call for the preparation of a new and ambitious Eastern Partnership strategy.

Cooperation in education and science

The Baltic States are coordinating their research and innovation (R&I) policies on a permanent basis. The Renewed European Research Area (ERA) and the ERA Policy Agenda for 2022–2024 provide a framework for cooperation, a list of common actions, a common monitoring framework and mechanisms for policy dialogues. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania reaffirm their commitment to investment targets as defined in the Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe.

EEA 2014-2021 Financial Mechanism Baltic Research Programme has achieved considerable results. Cooperation is further strengthened in the European Cooperation in Science and

Technology programme and the Nordic-Baltic PhD and Researcher Mobility Programme for 2022–2024.

Cooperation with the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) has significantly intensified international collaboration in all the three Baltic States enabling the development of new national research programmes in particle physics and particle accelerator technologies.

Scientists of the Baltic States closely cooperate in space-related research, in particular, in the domain of cybersecurity and Earth Observation and also through activities of the European Space Agency (ESA). The Baltic Round Table has been established with the aim of fostering the “New Space” approach and encouraging cooperation between academia and small and medium enterprises in the Baltics by using ESA programmes as a tool for cooperation. The “New Space” approach means Baltic public sector as a smart procurer of space technology-based services from Baltic technology sector.

A conference of the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers, “Science and innovations – key to sustainable and prosperous regional development of the Baltic States”, which took place on 12 and 13 May 2022 in Riga, provided useful insights into current policy development in all the three Baltic states as well as outlining guidance for further cooperation in R&I, education and space sectors. The conference highlighted willingness and readiness for closer cooperation and coordination between our countries that should be encouraged.

The Baltic States support the direct cooperation between their educational institutions. One of the most successful international instruments for enhancing this cooperation is the Nordic-Baltic programme Nordplus aimed at the establishment of a Nordic-Baltic educational region, development and dissemination of innovative products and processes in education, contribution to the development of quality and innovation in the education systems. The educational institutions from the Baltic States are among the most active participants in the programme. The Baltic participation in Nordplus is growing steadily and we expect continuous successful Baltic-Nordic partnerships in the new Programme period 2023-2027.

Cooperation in the field of culture

In order to strengthen links in different cultural fields, continue working in the existing cultural cooperation formats and develop new initiatives, the Programme of Cultural Cooperation for 2023–2026 was signed on 16 September 2022.

Since the establishment of the Baltic Culture Fund five years ago, the collaborative visibility of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian culture has significantly increased. In the music field, during the Worldwide Music EXPO (WOMEX) in 2023 the Baltic States hosted a joint pavilion as well as concerts from each of the countries. Through the common presentation of merged Baltic music market, talented musicians emphasized the diversity of our traditions, and became more visible in the global music market. In the 2023 edition of MENT, one of the leading showcase festivals and music conferences in Central and Eastern Europe, the first-ever Baltic focus was introduced. This showcased vibrant scenes from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, featuring numerous artists, music professionals, product presentations, and a wide range of conference topics from the Baltic States. In the field of visual arts, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were represented by a showcase of Baltic glass art at the European Glass Festival. Additionally, at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2023, a series of Baltic sessions provided participants and visitors with a deeper understanding of the themes represented in the Biennale through the presentations of the three pavilions. Our countries are pleased that the international awareness of the Baltic States’ culture is successfully promoted with support from the Baltic Culture Fund, however, we also express readiness to encourage more trilateral cultural projects in the Baltic States to be supported through the existing national instruments for international cooperation.

The Song and Dance Festival tradition has played a significant role in creating our national identity and maintaining the idea of independent nations through difficult periods of history. To cherish this unforgettable amateur art phenomenon our countries are working together to continue this tradition in the highest possible quality. In 2023, Latvia marked the 150th anniversary of the Latvian Song and Dance Festival tradition. 2024 marks the centenary of the Song Festival in Lithuania, and Estonia is preparing for the Song and Dance Celebration in 2025.

The Baltic States express their wholehearted solidarity with a war-torn Ukraine and its people by implementing various support measures directed at Ukrainian artists and cultural professionals. In the framework of the Lviv Declaration adopted in June 2022, we 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 July 2023, during the XXVII Nationwide Latvian Song and XVII Dance Festival, the Ministers of Culture of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine signed a joint declaration confirming the strengthening of regional support for Ukraine and drawing attention to the deliberate destruction of Ukrainian cultural heritage by Russia.

The Baltic Council has defined the following priorities for cooperation in 2024:

1. Regional security, including safety of critical infrastructure.
2. Bolstering regional interconnectivity.
3. Support to Ukraine including uniform sanctions implementation.

The 30th Baltic Council will be held during the Lithuanian Presidency on 18 October 2024 in Vilnius, the Republic of Lithuania.

Timo Suslov

President of the Baltic Assembly

Tallinn, 24 November 2023

Margus Tsahkna

Minister of Foreign Affairs