

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE 28th BALTIC COUNCIL

On 28 October 2022 in Riga, the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers convened for the 28th Baltic Council to discuss cooperation in security and defence, support for Ukraine and sanctions against Russia, to review progress in developing regional energy and transport infrastructure projects, and to define the objectives of Baltic parliamentary and governmental cooperation for the year 2023.

The Baltic Council declares the following:

Geopolitical situation

Russia's large-scale military invasion of Ukraine has irreversibly changed the security environment across the Euro-Atlantic area. The unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine and the attempted illegal annexation of its sovereign territory aim to erode the pillars of the European cooperative security architecture and have exacerbated the growing strategic competition between peaceful democratic states and autocratic regimes. As stated in NATO's new Strategic Concept, the Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace and the Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security. The EU's Strategic Compass for security and defence also declares that Russia constitutes a long-term and direct threat to European security. Russian unjustified aggression and potential further military escalation pose a major threat to the security of the Baltic States and the whole Baltic Sea region. Russia's strategic intent goes well beyond Ukraine. The outcome of the war will determine the new security order in Europe.

The historic decisions made in Finland and Sweden to seek NATO membership are a clear affirmation that NATO – the world's strongest defensive Alliance – has the will and the capabilities to deter Russia and defend every inch of NATO soil. Finland's and Sweden's accession will have a positive effect on the security of the Baltic region and will improve the strategic environment. Finland and Sweden have developed highly capable armed forces and defence industries, which have contributed significantly to the development of the armed forces of the Baltic States. Their accession to NATO will open the doors for even closer cooperation. However, the accession of new members to NATO also underlines the requirement to continue strengthening credible deterrence and defence as a collective effort, which requires full commitment from every single Ally.

We value NATO's open door policy, which has contributed significantly to security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. Today, when the Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace, we affirm 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. Decisions on membership are taken by NATO Allies and no third party has a say in this process.

Strong transatlantic partnership and NATO remain indispensable for European security and defence. NATO's policies and measures for strengthening deterrence and defence and the implementation of the decisions adopted at the NATO Summit in Madrid, as well as previous NATO Summits have never been more vital. It is of utmost importance to continue work on both national and regional level to enhance collective defence efforts, rapidly implement the Madrid summit decisions and build upon them for the next NATO Summit in Vilnius and onwards.

Such hybrid threats as disinformation and propaganda, 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. The recent attacks on the Nord Stream gas pipelines are yet another serious reminder of the dangers of such dependencies to our security. Developing a common threat perception and supporting and learning from each other, also in the EU and NATO formats, is therefore essential.

Security and defence matters in the region, including transatlantic relations

The Baltic States are linked by a common geographic location, history, and culture – those factors have shaped the strong, diverse and practical cooperation between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The closeness of Baltic defence cooperation sets an example for other European states. With joint training, including in professional military education at the Baltic Defence College (accredited by NATO ACT since 13 July 2022), procurement, capability alignment, political and military dialogue, the Baltic States are continuing to improve both their national and regional security and defence. Since Russia's brutal aggression against Ukraine, a common Baltic position in NATO and the EU has become sine qua non of addressing current geopolitical challenges.

In light of recognition of Russia as the most significant and direct threat to Allied security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area, NATO agreed to set a new baseline for deterrence and defence posture. The Madrid Summit decision to scale up the existing NATO enhanced Forward Presence battlegroups to brigade-size units where and when required and to establish new divisional-level command structures on the Eastern flank is significant move towards ensuring defence of every inch of NATO territory. We must ensure that the Forward Defence and deterrence by denial approach serves as the main driver for NATO's defence plans, force organization and capability development. In order to strengthen our security and defence we must implement the historic decisions of the 2022 Madrid Summit with speed and ambition. Next year's summit in Vilnius will serve as an important point of reference by which tangible progress with regard to the implementation of the Madrid Summit decisions must be achieved. Summit in Vilnius will be an opportunity to agree on further steps of strengthening NATO and accelerating its adaptation. Adequate defence spending and defence modernisation are key for keeping NATO fit for purpose, therefore, renewing Defence Investment Pledge beyond 2024 could be one of Summit's deliverables.

We reaffirm our full commitment to strengthening our strategic partnership with the US and Canada, rooted in shared values. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has been met with an extraordinary show of transatlantic unity and resolve. This unity, solidarity, and cohesion among the transatlantic partners remain the cornerstone for security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. NATO remains the foundation of our collective defence and the essential forum for security consultations and decisions. Cooperation within the NATO Alliance has proved to be the key pillar for the long-term security and prosperity of the entire transatlantic community. The US military presence in the Baltics and elsewhere in Europe, as well as security and defence cooperation significantly strengthen our collective defence efforts and serve as a strong deterrent from possible Russian aggression. As stated in EU's Strategic compass the United States remain the EU's staunchest and most important strategic partner. Additionally, a strong NATO-EU strategic partnership based on mutually reinforcing cooperation, is important for addressing current common challenges. Enhanced NATO-EU political dialogue, as well as complementary and interoperable defence capabilities ensuring the single set of forces principle and coordination at all levels, are key to contributing to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. Moreover, a bold and robust transatlantic bond is also vital for addressing the mounting global challenges to peace, democracy and the rules-based international order.

Support for Ukraine

The Baltic States reaffirm their unwavering support to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We stand firmly against the blatant violations of international law, norms and values by Russia. We strongly condemn and do not recognize illegal annexation of Ukraine's occupied territories by Russia.

Ukraine continues to fight for its independence, but also for the security of all Europe. Ukraine's clear victory and Russia's clear defeat is necessary to ensure lasting peace and security in Europe. We reiterate to all Allies and partners the importance of ensuring sustainable long-term international military, economic assistance to Ukraine until its victory.

The Baltic States are among the strongest supporters of Ukraine, and have provided significant financial, military, humanitarian and development assistance. Since the first days of Russian invasion, governments and people of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania have donated food, medical products, devices and equipment, ambulance and other vehicles, equipment for rescue and firefighting, and clothing to Ukraine. The Baltic States have provided military equipment, technical support and training for Ukrainian armed forces, border guard service and law enforcement authorities. The Baltic States continues to provide long term sponsorship (since 2015) to Ukrainian officers gaining professional military education according to NATO standards in Baltic Defence College. Wounded Ukrainian soldiers have received medical treatment in our countries.

Our societies have mobilised in welcoming Ukrainian refugees. The Baltic States have ensured emergency help for Ukrainian civilians and remain committed to providing protection and support needed. Accommodating Ukrainian refugees is our moral duty. Ukrainians who have found refuge in the Baltic States are receiving treatment equal to our nationals as regards access to education, labour market, social security and health care, as well as assistance as regards accommodation. Our authorities cooperate closely in order to prevent Ukrainian refugees from becoming victims of serious and organised crime, especially human trafficking.

Granting Ukraine the EU candidate country status by the European Council was a historic decision. The Baltic States will continue to support Ukraine as a candidate country in every step of its reform process. Baltic States stand ready to share their experience of the European integration process. We particularly stress our support in areas such as good governance and the rule of law, including administrative capacity building and digitalisation, as well as economic growth, particularly the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, including strengthening export capacity and rural development.

The Baltic States will also continue to support Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, inter alia, in light of the Joint Appeal letter by Ukraine sent to NATO on September 30. The Baltic States look forward to continuing discussions at NATO on further strengthening both political and practical NATO-Ukraine engagement, on possible steps towards Ukraine's membership in the Alliance and encourage restoring regular high-level NATO-Ukraine Commission meetings, including at the leaders' level at the Summit in Vilnius.

The Russian aggression in Ukraine has caused unprecedented magnitude of destruction of the civilian and critical infrastructure across the country. The Baltic States firmly believe that Russia must ultimately bear the costs of reconstruction in Ukraine. Frozen Russian assets in Europe and elsewhere should be used to rebuild Ukraine's infrastructure. We welcome the global efforts to begin the process of reconstruction. It is crucial that this process is based on Ukraine's needs and is well coordinated among all involved parties. We are adamant that the support for reconstruction process has to start immediately. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania are ready to take an active role in these efforts – in the short term through supporting Ukraine's winterization efforts and providing immediate support for social infrastructure, as well as restarting Ukrainian businesses. We call on the international community to swiftly prepare for long-term recovery efforts. In response to the call by the President of Ukraine, each of the Baltic States has committed to engage in the reconstruction of objects in a specific region in Ukraine: Estonia of Zhitomir, Latvia of Chernihiv, and Lithuania of Kyiv.

We need to seek ways that would allow us to strengthen our industrial capacity in order to ensure both long-term support to Ukraine and development of our own military capabilities.

The Baltic States stand firm in condemning the atrocities Russian armed forces have committed in and against Ukraine in grave violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, and the Ukrainian Constitution. Russian aggression in Ukraine must have a legal response at the international level. Abduction, detention, torture, inhuman and degrading

treatment or punishment, sexual violence, and indiscriminate killings of civilians cannot and will not be tolerated and forgotten. We continue to focus on documenting the crimes of aggression, crimes against humanity, war crimes, human rights violations, and destruction committed by the Russian armed forces. The perpetrators of atrocity crimes in Ukraine need to be brought to justice. The Baltic States support Ukraine's proposals on the establishment of a Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression.

Sanctions against Russia

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania condemn, in the strongest possible terms, Russia's unjustifiable, unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine as a flagrant violation of international law that undermines the very foundation of the international order.

Russia is an aggressor that has started unprovoked and unjustified war against Ukraine. Russia commits war crimes against civilians, destroys Ukraine's economy and civil infrastructure. Russia's leadership no longer hides its imperial ambitions. The mobilization, illegal annexation, and brutal bombings in the cities of Ukraine are yet another proof of Russia being determined to continue aggression against Ukraine and interested in the escalation of the war.

Ever since the war began, the Baltic States have been jointly supporting international efforts to put diplomatic, political and economic pressure on Russia. We jointly spearheaded the EU's sanctions against Russia. Unprecedented eight packages of the EU sanctions that cover all major sectors of Russian economy have been adopted. We remain determined to further increase collective pressure on Russia, including through further swift and stronger sanctions, to end its war of aggression. We closely work together regarding the ninth package of the EU sanctions. The EU sanctions will accumulate and will have a long-term negative impact on Russia's economy.

Free travel by citizens of an aggressor state, at a time when Russia has invaded Ukraine, is not only immoral, but also creates a threat to public order and security. Since spring, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania have stopped issuing visas to Russian citizens for non-essential travel, such as tourism. An agreement by Baltic States and Poland to restrict the entry of Russian citizens at a regional level entered into force on September 19. We welcome the decision by Finland to restrict the entry of Russian citizens across its borders.

The Russian government is using disinformation and propaganda to mobilize domestic and international support for its aggression in Ukraine. The Baltic States have been at the forefront, within the EU and beyond, of addressing and advocating for action to face this challenge. We should continue to do so, particularly focusing on the urgent need for European Union-level tools to impose costs on Russia's actors engaging in foreign manipulation and interference activities, including through developing options for restrictive measures to be imposed on such actors, as part of the forthcoming Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference toolbox. We will continue working for more responsibility and accountability on the part of tech companies through effective implementation on the EU Digital Services Act and the strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation. We will urge the EU Member States to take action and expand the list of banned Russian and Belarusian propaganda TV channels.

Regional energy projects, connectivity

Cross-border infrastructure and cooperation remain at the core of the regional energy policy. The work on improving key gas and electricity interconnections continues in the Baltic region, 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 reducing the dependency of the entire region on Russian gas and diversifying supply routes. The Klaipėda LNG terminal currently operates at its full capacity, ensuring gas supply and increasing energy security of the whole Baltic region. Other projects, including the modernization of the region's

only underground gas storage facility at Inčukalns and the expansion of the gas interconnection and regional LNG import capacity, also help increase the energy independence of the Baltic States.

The Baltic States continue advancing the synchronization of the Baltic electricity grid with the continental European network to strengthen their energy security and facilitate the desynchronization from the Russia-led Integrated Power System/United Power System (IPS/UPS) grid and are on track to complete the project by target date in 2025. The Baltic States together with European Commission are working together to achieve the synchronisation at an earlier date.

Electricity transmission system operators of the Baltic States that implement the project – Latvian JSC Augstsprieguma tīkls, Lithuanian Litgrid AB, and Estonian Elering AS – remain committed to carrying out the synchronization smoothly and in the spirit of solidarity and active cross-border cooperation.

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 and common grid planning, as stated in the Marienborg Declaration. 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. It is essential to conclude a non-binding agreement, as soon as possible, to cooperate on aggregate goals for offshore renewable generation to be deployed by 2050, with intermediate steps in 2030 and 2040. The Estonian-Latvian joint offshore wind and grid project, ELWIND, is a good example of such cooperation.

The Baltic States acknowledge the importance to enhance resilience and protection of critical infrastructure, including those in maritime domain, and encourage the European Commission to prepare guidelines on how member states should strengthen cooperation in protecting strategic energy facilities, also in the framework of EU-NATO cooperation.

Development of transport infrastructure

In the current geopolitical situation, the Baltic States recognize the urgent need to ensure the fastest possible implementation of the Rail Baltica project. It is a matter of security of the Baltic States and the Baltic Sea region. 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 are pleased to acknowledge that despite the turbulent times the Rail Baltica project has made significant progress in all the three Baltic States. The Baltic States welcome the goal formulated in the amended proposal of the TEN-T regulation to migrate railway network standard to 1435 mm standard to end the dependence of the railway sector on the 1520 mm gauge network in the long term and based on respective analyses.

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. We count on the European Commission's further support. The three Baltic countries are in agreement over the need to review the Connecting Europe Facility Multiannual Work Programme 2021–2023 (MAP) to align it with the European Council MFF agreement of July 2020 and the CEF Regulation from 2021 as regards targeted support for the missing major cross-border railway links between Cohesion Countries, and seek further opportunities for the EU's financial support for the delivery of Rail Baltica as a project of increased strategic importance to the region and the EU.

The Baltic States underline the importance of the synergies between defence needs and transport infrastructure development; therefore, we value the first allocations from the CEF Military Mobility envelope. The Baltic States highlight the significance of a cohesive approach to further road and railway development that would improve both national and allied military mobility within the territories of the three Baltic States. It is of the opinion of the Baltic States that enhancing regional military mobility capabilities is of utmost importance in the face of an outside threat. By increasing the available funds for improving infrastructure dedicated to enhancing military mobility capabilities, as well as by carrying out a comprehensive evaluation for the further support of military mobility projects, it would be possible to ensure effective military mobility operations, that are of critical importance in crisis situations.

The Baltic States also reconfirm that financing related to Rail Baltica will also be given priority in the national budgets.

The Baltic States are in agreement over the need to ensure a joint Rail Baltica infrastructure management approach that will provide equal, non-discriminatory and easy access to infrastructure to railway undertakings, customers and other third parties. While respecting that there are functions that can be carried out at the national level only, we strive towards coordinated solutions allowing us to reach the shared goals. We note that the work on an applicable infrastructure management model is still underway and work commences on other aspects to ensure readiness for operations.

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.) to ensure successful implementation of a cross-border 5G transport corridor.

Three Seas Initiative

Three Seas Initiative together with its Investment Fund is a politically inspired platform for improving connectivity from the Baltic to the Adriatic and Black seas. Through the Three Seas Initiative, our region can boost the growth of economy today and shape the economic growth tomorrow. In order to make the initiative even more functional, we need to deepen our cooperation on the governmental level.

This year's summit in Riga focused on the development of better resilience throughout the region, emphasising the importance of a closely connected Baltic region in a sustainable and innovative way, especially in light of the current volatile geopolitical and economic situation.

The Three Seas Initiative offers an opportunity to build resilience and increase smart investments in infrastructure projects in the fields of transport, energy and digitalization that boosts regions economic and social development as well as synergy between the public and private sector. The better we are connected, the stronger is our resilience. To obtain practical results, a collective and cooperative approach that recognises the individual strengths of each nation is crucial. Staying united is a key factor in attracting more investments that foster implementation of strategically important projects, secure sustainable growth, and increase competitiveness of the Baltic region.

We welcome Ukraine's participation in the Three Seas Initiative. We see that the Initiative can also contribute to Ukraine's recovery.

Belarus

Deep military integration between Russia and Belarus and the role that Minsk played in aggression against Ukraine constitute major threat to the regional stability.

Belarus continues using tools of hybrid warfare targeting the Baltic region and Europe as a whole. Belarus has, since the start of the war, allowed to use its land and air space as a platform for Russian attacks against Ukraine. Should the launch of the counter-terrorism operation in Belarus on October 14 be used by Lukashenko's regime as a pretext to invade Ukraine, this will have serious consequences for Belarus, including further sanctions.

Lukashenko's regime remains in existential dependence on Moscow. In these circumstances any steps further restricting the sovereignty of the Belarusian people should not be recognized by the international community.

The Baltic nations are united in their strong support to Belarusian civil society in the face of systemic actions of the Lukashenko regime aimed at eliminating any voice of opposition and silencing free media after the fraudulent presidential elections of August 2020.

We strongly condemn the ongoing repressions, instrumentalisation of migration against the EU border and involvement of Lukashenko's regime in Russia's war against Ukraine. Lukashenko's regime is equally responsible for death and destruction the war has caused.

The Baltic nations will continue to support the international accountability efforts for Belarus. All political prisoners must be freed unconditionally and without delay. Work to obtain justice for the regime's victims and holding the perpetrators to account is important for the democratic future of Belarus. Lukashenko's regime should be also held accountable for complicity in Russia's aggression against Ukraine, in addition to sanctions that must be strengthened against Belarus for its involvement in Russia's war in Ukraine.

Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania believe the only way forward are free and fair presidential elections in the presence of international observers. We believe 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.

The Baltic States will further follow our agreed policy of EU Ambassadors not presenting' credentials to Lukashenko, and not accepting new Belarusian ambassadors in our capitals. Meanwhile, the Baltic States will continue to provide support for the democratic movement of Belarus, including civil society and media that are forced to work outside their country.

Nuclear and environmental safety

The Baltic States express their concern over the unsafe development and operation of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) near the border of the EU without providing information. The unjustifiable rush of the commissioning of the Belarussian NPP in violation of international obligations regarding environmental protection and highest safety requirements and standards, leads to repetitive equipment failures and prolonged outages. We repeatedly urge Belarus to take all necessary steps to comply with the international nuclear and environmental safety regulations and recommendations provided by the international experts without any further delay and seeking to ensure transparency and openness regularly publish reports on implementation of the recommendations. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania call on the international community and the European Commission to maintain focus on Belarus 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 Partnership region. The Eastern Partnership has demonstrated its value through supporting democratic reforms in the region and strengthening the resilience of the partner countries against a variety of pressures, including those emanating from the aggressive policy of Russia. We welcome 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, which is a great achievement and success of the EaP policy and proves its strategic ambitious and transformative power. The Baltic States are committed to providing expertise and assistance to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in achieving the goal of membership in the EU. We consider the Eastern Partnership as a complimentary tool deepening the European integration of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. In this regard, we support a renewal of the Eastern Partnership priorities and believe the cooperation between the EU and Eastern Partnership countries should be made more flexible, reflecting on the changing needs and expectations of each Eastern partner.

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.

Our countries are pleased that the international awareness of the Baltic States' culture is successfully promoted with support from the Baltic Culture Fund, and express a wish to encourage more trilateral cultural projects in the Baltic States to be supported through the existing national instruments for international cooperation.

The Baltic States continue to implement the inter-ministerial Agreement on the Baltic States Committee for the Safeguarding and Development of the Song and Dance Celebration Tradition, signed in 2018. In 2023, Latvia will hold the XXVII Nationwide Latvian Song and XVII Dance Celebration, which will mark the 150th anniversary of this tradition. Lithuania is preparing for the Song Celebration in 2024, and Estonia is preparing for the Song and Dance Celebration in 2025. In 2023, Estonia will also hold the 13th Youth Song and Dance Festival.

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.

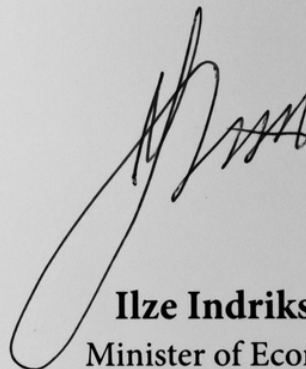
The Baltic Council has defined the following priorities for cooperation in 2023:

1. Regional security and defence
2. Energy security and security of supply
3. Support to Ukraine

The 29th Baltic Council will be held during the Estonian Presidency on 24 November 2023 in Tallinn, the Republic of Estonia.



Jānis Vucāns
President of the Baltic Assembly



Ilze Indriksone
Minister of Economics

Riga, 28 October 2022