

## **JOINT STATEMENT OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> BALTIC COUNCIL**

On 24 October 2014 in Tallinn, the Republic of Estonia, the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers convened for the 20<sup>th</sup> Baltic Council to discuss the development of regional energy market and transport sector, cross-border use of digital signatures and electronic authentication of persons, foreign and security cooperation, development of EU Eastern Partnership as well as to evaluate progress on the joint priorities set for 2014 and to define objectives for 2015.

Latvia prepares for the EU Presidency during the first half of 2015. Lithuania will join the Eurozone on 1 January 2015. Participation of all three countries in the Eurozone is an important milestone for our region that will facilitate economic growth and competitiveness. Latvia moves towards the membership of the OECD, and Lithuania expects to begin accession talks with the OECD in 2015.

The year 2014 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baltic Way and 10 years of the Baltic States' membership in the EU and NATO.

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

The Baltic States work closely in the European Union to achieve best results for the region and the whole EU. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania continue to cooperate in relation to the Presidencies of the Council of the EU by sharing experience and supporting each other.

The Baltic States play an active role in the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, where among the current main tasks are the good governance and embedding the projects of the Strategy into the new set of instruments of the new financial period 2014-2020.

Many areas of the Baltic cooperation are similar to those of the Nordic - Baltic cooperation – cyber security, energy security, regional security, relations with the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. On the basis of parliamentary and governmental Nordic - Baltic cooperation an active dialogue with Visegrad countries is developing, to better coordinate policies and measures in different fields of mutual interest.

The Baltic States welcome the NATO Wales Summit decisions and expect their swift implementation. The Baltic States input in implementing strategic decisions of the Summit is important, seeking to improve the security situation in our region, especially in the light of the worsened security environment caused by Russian annexation of Crimea and continued aggression in other parts of Eastern Ukraine. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania highly appreciate NATO's reassurance and deterrence measures in the Baltic region and the Allies' readiness to contribute with their troops to these measures. The Baltic States will concentrate improving host nation support for the incoming reinforcements and putting in place other arrangements needed for defence and security of Baltic region. We focus our attention on the robust defence capabilities and firm further increase of defence funding.

Interoperability between the Baltic defence forces has been a priority and will remain so. The Baltic States also stress the importance of the decision to provide a joint Baltic Battalion to the NATO Response Force exercise in 2016.

The Baltic States continue working closely together to support and further develop the Eastern Partnership initiative in a view of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga in May 2015. We reaffirm our commitment to assist Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in implementation of the Association Agreements with the EU as well as developing efficient framework of cooperation with the other three Eastern European Partner countries. All the tools of the Baltic cooperation should also be mobilised to stand with the Eastern Partnership countries facing aggression to ensure stability and prosperity of the region.

The Baltic States strongly support the development of the EU Digital Single Market (DSM). Mutual use of eID and signatures is a fundamental and prerequisite for emerging of the DSM. In order to make the progress significant, priority must additionally be given to the creating the conditions for the free data exchange and the access to digital content across the EU. The main goal for 2014 has been to make it possible for Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian eIDs to be used jointly for digital signing, plus for cross-border authentication in at least one pilot electronic service in each of the three countries.

The Baltic States continue to pay serious attention to the challenges in the field of energy and work on the implementation of the Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP), improving connections, developing energy market in gas and electricity sectors, building infrastructure to improve energy security and improving energy efficiency, step up efforts in a view of synchronisation of the Baltic States into European Continental Networks. The implementation of the EU Third Energy package is of utmost importance to ensure fully functioning and integrated regional energy market. The Baltic States actively cooperate on the harmonization and integration of electricity and gas markets. In addition to Estlink-1 and Estlink-2, electricity connections to Nordic electricity system (NordBalt) and continental European networks (LitPol) are under construction. The Baltic States continue negotiations on implementation of Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant project. Serious efforts are needed to improve the security of gas supply in general. The LNG terminal in Klaipeda Lithuania, fully operational by the 1<sup>th</sup> of January 2015, will increase the security of supply in the Baltic region by providing import alternative in case of supply disruption.

In 2014, the *Rail Baltic* Task Force finally concluded the negotiations on the terms of Shareholders` Agreement and agreed to take all necessary steps at the national level in order to approve and sign the Shareholders` Agreement and establish the *Rail Baltic* Joint Venture as soon as possible. Joint Venture has to prepare and submit the Rail Baltic project application for funding of the Connecting Europe Facility and to start the implementation of the Project. The Rail Baltic will support the wider EU goals of parity of access to services and infrastructure of EU Member States and development of sustainable modes of transportation, improved balance and interoperability between different means of transportation and the establishment of links with the rest of the EU rail network.

Cooperation in the field of agriculture has been promoted in 2014 to meet several current challenges. Ministers of Agriculture elaborate common positions as a reaction to the trade measures/embargo imposed by the Russian Federation. This is important both in communication with the Russian Federation and in addressing the European Commission by calling to elaborate appropriate alleviation measures. The Baltic States are developing a common approach in regard to the most affected region which includes Poland and Finland. Cooperation of the Baltic States in the field of food safety and control is most useful and helps to guarantee food safety and animal health e.g. dealing with African Swine Fever. In all those fields, operative and open information exchange has built the basis for good common understanding.

The Baltic States should continue implementation of the Partnership Agreement on Joint Procurements of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices and Lending of Medicinal Products and Medical Devices Procurable Centrally, expand cross-border coordination of emergency aid, as well as to develop cooperation in regard to the joint e-health system.

The Baltic Council defined the following joint priorities for cooperation in 2015:

- 1) Enhancement of regional security measures in cooperation with NATO allies and implementation of the Readiness Action Plan approved by leaders of NATO member countries;
- 2) Cooperation in implementing the EU's Eastern Partnership policy,
- 3) Acceleration of integration and connection of the Baltic States into EU networks and markets, strengthening of energy security of the Baltic States and development of the Baltic regional energy market in implementing goals of the EU 2030 framework for climate and energy policies;
- 4) Cooperation in the area of improvement of information security of the Baltic States;
- 5) Cohesion with Nordic-Baltic cooperation.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Baltic Council will be held during the Lithuanian presidency on 20 November 2015 in Vilnius, the Republic of Lithuania.

**Laine Randjärv**  
President of the Baltic Assembly

**Urmas Paet**  
Chairman of the Cooperation Council  
of the Baltic Council of Ministers

Tallinn, 24 October 2014