

Joint Statement of the 17th Baltic Council

On 25 November 2011 in Tallinn, the Republic of Estonia, the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers convened for the 17th Baltic Council to discuss the development of a regional energy market, development of knowledge-based economy and development of infrastructure projects as well as to evaluate progress on the priorities set for 2011 and to define the objectives for 2012.

The Baltic Council welcomes the Joint Statement of the Prime Minister's Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers of 10 November 2011.

The Baltic Council notes with satisfaction the positive tendencies of economic stabilisation in the Baltic States, as they have rebalanced their economies and returned to growth. However, important challenges still remain. The Baltic States shall continue to follow comprehensive and determined actions on the path towards sustainable economic growth based on high value added production and well developed services sector. Speedy implementation of the EU 2020 strategy and the Euro Plus Pact are the main instruments to achieve the above-mentioned goals.

The Baltic Council appreciates the well-established traditions and progress achieved in partnership among the Baltic States. The political dialogue of the Baltic States is regular and active on different levels. In the interests of the Baltic States is to streamline economic cooperation and contacts in order to develop economically integrated region.

The Baltic Council declares the following:

- The Baltic States need a fully functioning, interconnected and integrated regional energy market. Ambitious energy projects are vital for securing energy independence of the Baltic States from third countries and fully integrating them into the EU. Special attention should be paid to projects aimed to diversify energy sources and to end energy isolation of Baltic countries, especially focusing on commitments to co-operate within BEMIP framework. Regional cooperation should be based on principles of solidarity, partnership, mutual support and balance. Swift development of new gas infrastructure projects is necessary to facilitate Baltic States' competitiveness and economic growth. Implementation of the joint energy projects of the Baltic States shall be continued in accordance with the reached agreements.
- The implementation of the nuclear energy projects in the region shall be based on the highest nuclear safety and environmental standards, especially in the EU neighboring states.
- Investments in education, research, technologies and innovation are key drivers of sustainable growth. The Baltic States should agree on developing strategic and integrated approach towards common education, research, technologies and innovation area. The Baltic States shall take advantage of shared use of research and development infrastructure to improve mobility of knowledge and skills, but also cost-effectiveness to carry out research and development.
- The Baltic States shall intensify cooperation in regard to the creation of preconditions for launching digital single market in the region by harmonising the standards and testing procedures in the Baltic States, intensifying co-operation on intellectual property rights and encouraging data collection, exchange and sharing of best practices in order to find new ways for developing e-services in the public sphere.

- Progress of the Task Force on Health established under the purview of Baltic Council of Ministers is highly evaluated. The Baltic States should continue started collaboration in joint health care activities.
- Information exchange among the Baltic States, as well as coordinated dissemination of information about the region as a whole brings social, economic and political benefits to all the citizens of the region. Intensified academic exchange should be used to unite resources for research that leads to innovation. Digital technologies should be exploited to develop cooperative and interactive sources of news and information about the region, promoting culture, business development and social interaction.
- Development of joint infrastructure projects will foster attraction of investments, increase mobility and enhance competitiveness. Implementation of the joint transport infrastructure project Rail Baltic shall be continued in accordance with the Joint Statement of the Prime Minister's Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers of 10 November 2011.
- The Baltic States should strengthen an efficient and a target-oriented cooperation with the Nordic countries in order to ensure a sustainable development of the region. Nordic Council of Ministers' offices in the Baltic States carry key role in this co-operation, the continuation of their activities also in the future is considered to be of utmost importance. Both on parliamentary and governmental level the Baltic and Nordic countries should carry on the implementation of the NB8 Wise Men Report's recommendations thus promoting a closer regional partnership, a resource pooling and a coherence of the NB8 cooperation on a European and a global level.
- The Baltic States should aspire for a long-term solution for NATO Air Policing as a clear demonstration of NATO's solidarity.
- Estonia and Latvia welcome Lithuanian efforts for the accreditation of the Energy Security Center as a NATO Center of Excellence.

The Baltic Council defined the following priorities for cooperation in 2012:

- 1) joint measures and projects enhancing economic growth and employment;
- 2) development of Baltic energy market, integration of it into the EU energy system by developing strategic energy projects;
- 3) achieving a long-term solution for NATO Air Policing in the Baltic States;
- 4) creation of single digital market;
- 5) effective coordinated implementation of the joint transport infrastructure project Rail Baltic.

The 18th Baltic Council will be held during the Lithuanian presidency on 8 – 9 November 2012 in Vilnius, the Republic of Lithuania.

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the Baltic Council of Ministers

Tallinn, 25 November 2011