

# **Prime Ministers` Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers**

## **Joint Statement**

The Prime Minister of Estonia Mr Taavi Rõivas, the Prime Minister of Latvia Mrs. Laimdota Straujuma and the Prime Minister of Lithuania Mr. Algirdas Butkevičius met within the framework of the Baltic Council of Ministers on 5 December 2014 in Maardu, Estonia. The Prime Ministers discussed the key issues of regional and trilateral co-operation, as well as EU agenda. The Prime Ministers reviewed the progress achieved by the Baltic States implementing common regional projects in compliance with the priorities of the Estonian chairmanship in the Baltic Council of Ministers in 2014. In this review the main attention was devoted to IT, energy and transport infrastructure projects and security issues.

### **Security and defence**

Prime Ministers:

recognising the changed security environment caused by the Russian illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea and continued aggression in Eastern Ukraine and that its noticeably increased military activity in the Baltic Sea region has considerably worsened the security environment in Europe,

- welcomed the decision of NATO's Wales Summit and the adoption of the Readiness Action Plan and stressed the need to promptly implement all its agreed elements in their entirety;
- recognised the importance of NATO's measures that address both the assurance of Allies and the adaptation of the Alliance's military strategic posture and stressed the necessity to pursue joint Baltic efforts in seeking to increase NATO's continuous air, land and maritime presence and meaningful military activity in the Baltic region;
- expressed the political support for the enhanced coordination among the Baltic Defence Ministers to improve the conditions and the provision of the Host Nation Support for Allied forces in the Baltic region;
- underlined the importance of reaching and maintaining adequate levels of defence spending at 2% of GDP;
- affirmed their determination to provide a joint Baltic Battalion to NATO Response Force (NRF) in 2016;
- emphasized the need to strengthen the Baltic co-operation in the field of defence to enhance the security situation in the region.

### **IT co-operation and e-Government**

Prime Ministers:

- acknowledged the results on an expert level to carry out the work programme for 2014 in the area of ICT cooperation, which was focused on cross-border use of electronic identity (eID) and electronic signatures between the Baltic States;
- welcomed that it is now possible to use Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian eIDs jointly for electronic signing within national signing solutions,

- stressed the need to continue work on adding the support for each country's electronic signature file formats into the national signing solutions as a short-term solution in order to increase usability of cross-border signing;
- stressed the need to continue work to prepare a long-term roadmap for further cooperation and developments in the area of eID and electronic signatures. The aim should be to move towards joint development of eID infrastructure, also to create an interoperable or joint solution for electronic signature file formats and electronic document exchange, in order to make cross-border signing simple for our citizens and enterprises;
- emphasized the need to raise awareness and spread the practice of secure electronic signing, including cross-border signing between the Baltic States. The public administrations will have to lead the way, adopting electronic signing as the main option for any government-to-government communications between the three countries;
- welcomed the steps taken towards using three countries' eIDs mutually for authentication in electronic services in each of the Baltic States;
- agreed to continue to jointly invest in technical solutions needed to support cross-border transactions;
- called for further identification of public and private services that should be made to work cross-border between the Baltic States, to facilitate the economic integration and movement of people between our countries;
- welcomed the adoption of EU regulation on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market (eIDAS) and called for the fast completion of necessary implementation acts, including under the leadership of Latvia's presidency of EU;
- reiterated that the Digital Single Market is an essential driver of economic growth and facilitator for business development in the Baltic States and agreed that it is necessary to end market fragmentation and remove barriers limiting competitiveness and growth. It is therefore significant to agree on common priorities, coordinate positions during the EU legislative process on further harmonization of Digital Single Market;
- agreed that it is of vital importance to ensure uninterrupted operation and protection of critical infrastructure and essential services, and highlighted the need to formalise cyber security cooperation between the Baltic States through a trilateral Memorandum of Understanding. It is in the common interest of the Baltic States to create an operational cooperation for effective cross-border data exchange, information sharing and coordinated management of cyber security threats and incidents.

## **Energy**

### **Prime Ministers:**

- took note of the work carried out by the Baltic Council of Ministers Energy Committee in the last year in tackling the issues related to the development of electricity sector of the region, including 1) common projects of electricity generation, 2) synchronization with the networks of the Continental Europe and 3) operation of the electricity market.
- recognised the importance to synchronize Baltic networks with the network of Continental Europe by 2025 through direct interconnections between Lithuania and Poland;
- welcomed the initiation of a joint three Baltic States synchronisation Action Plan and encourage Energy Ministers to reach an agreement on common synchronization scenario and action plan and proceed with necessary next steps without delay;
- noted the importance of the ongoing work on the pre-feasibility study for the possible route of second Polish-Lithuanian power interconnection and ask Baltic Council of Ministers Senior Officials to update on study final results for the next Baltic Council of Ministers meeting;
- emphasize the importance of exploiting the possibilities provided by the status of Project of Common Interest (PCI) in the EU to reach further financing agreements with European

Commission and neighbouring countries (especially with Poland) in BEMIP framework by September 2015;

- expressed concern towards tight time limits for three Baltic States to succeed on preparing and agreeing on a long term solution (2016+) on capacity allocation methodology and underlines to the Baltic Council of Ministers Committee of Senior Energy Officials the importance of having a joint methodology, which should be approved no later than by summer 2015 especially taking into account the projected commissioning of LitPol Link and NordBalt interconnections;
- noted the importance of the Study on integration of the large scale unit (Visaginas NPP) to the power system and ask Baltic Council of Ministers Senior Officials to update on study final results for the next Baltic Council of Ministers meeting;
- requested Baltic Council of Ministers Committee of Senior Energy Officials to proceed with the resolution of intergovernmental level Open Issues identified in the Joint Position Paper of 30th September 2013 of the potential investors to the Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant project and submit proposals for the next Baltic Council of Ministers meeting;
- supported co-operation with regards to the development of the liberal, transparent and effectively functioning Regional Gas Market; - called for increased cooperation in the event of major energy disruptions as it was highlighted during the recent European Commission energy security stress tests. Reiterate the importance of the solidarity in case of gas security of supply emergencies;
- encourage the stakeholders to work closely together on the regional challenges with regards to the regional gas market
- recognised that energy security is underpinned by open, competitive and transparent international energy markets and therefore legal environment and full implementation of EU Third energy package must be ensured;
- welcomed the inauguration of the Klaipėda LNG terminal in Lithuania, which could be used to provide alternative gas supply to Latvian and Estonian consumers, and stressed that Latvia's Inčukalns underground gas storage and rapidly developing of Balticconnector between Estonia and Finland have a critical role to play in creating the Baltic gas market; Third party access to the gas infrastructure should be ensured to facilitate the liquid gas market
- welcomed the political agreement between Estonia and Finland on development of Balticconnector and regional LNG terminal;
- look forward to positive development of Gas Interconnection project between Poland and Lithuania bringing benefits to the whole Baltic region.

Prime ministers:

- initiate the establishment of the Regional Gas Market Coordination Group (ministries, regulators, , transmission system operators) with the main task to develop an Action Plan on regional gas market development.
- encourage the intensified regional co-operation in gas sector in risk assessment and emergency preparedness on a more systematic and regular basis and the rapid development of a regional Preventive Action Plan and Emergency Plan.

## **Transport**

Prime Ministers:

- reiterated the importance of implementing the Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica as fast conventional double track 1435 mm gauge electrified railway line with the maximum design speed of 240km/h on the Route from Tallinn through Pärnu-Riga-Panevezys-Kaunas to Lithuania-Polish order as proposed by AECOM study with a connecton of Vilnius-Kaunas as part of the Route.

- endorsed the Shareholders' Agreement, signed on 28 October 2014 in Riga, and recognized the establishment of the Joint Venture RB Rail AS with regard to the successful implementation of the Rail Baltica/Rail Baltic Project;
- recognised that the quick and constructive negotiations to reach concluding the Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica Intergovernmental Agreement is in the fundamental/mutual interests of the Baltic States, as the Agreement is a pre-requisite to successful implementation of this development. For enabling these negotiations, agreed to extend the deadline for submitting the draft of the Intergovernmental Agreement by the end of January 2015 at the very latest
- agreed to proceed with the Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica project activities on sections of the railway line, which are eligible for the EU Connecting Europe Facility's funding as stipulated by the relevant EU legislation, and to give the Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica project the high priority under the Connecting Europe Facility's transport call for project proposals; and reiterated their will to submit a joint Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica project application to the European Commission through the newly established Joint Venture (RB Rail AS) by the 26th of February 2015 at the latest.
- stressed that the strategic project needs adequate funding and therefore agreed that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania shall commit such amount of their indicative national envelopes under the Connecting Europe Facility regulation to the Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica project that is sufficient in order to successfully proceed with work on design and construction of the railway, where EU financial support should play crucial role.
- agreed sending a joint support letter to the European Commission with the project funding application and tasked the relevant transport ministries with proposing the final joint draft of the support letter to the Prime Ministers' offices by mid- February 2015 at the very latest.
- welcomed Lithuania's presentation on the complement of the AECOM study providing the justification of integrating Vilnius connection into the Rail Baltic/Rail Baltica Project for all the Project Partners;
- agreed to officially invite Poland and Finland as observers at the first stage to join the Supervisory Board of the Rail Baltic Joint Venture (RB Rail AS) and to task the representatives of the Baltic States in the Supervisory Board with sending the joint invitation to both countries by the end of January 2015 at the very latest; reiterated the invitation to the Republic of Poland and Republic of Finland to join the Rail Baltic Joint Venture in the future as shareholders under equal terms.

## **Information security**

### **Prime Ministers:**

- Stressed the need to counter the propaganda and disinformation distributed by media controlled by the Russian government and agreed that this can be accomplished through joint initiatives aimed at supporting broader access to balanced and fact based information, and fostering an environment conducive to a free and independent media.
- welcomed the establishment of NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga. NATO SC COE has proved itself has promising source of state-of-art expertise in contemporary security environment; The prime ministers call other states to join NATO SC COE.
- accentuated that as foreign subversive leverage has become a threat of concern, in national defence setup comprehensive approach to security is the way to go. In comprehensive approach to security military defense and internal security contribute to national security evenly with psychological defense, in integrated manner.

## **Eastern Partnership**

Prime Ministers:

- reiterated importance of the principled and solid EU's sanctions policy as well as comprehensive non-recognition policy of the illegal Crimea annexation stressing that these measures should remain in place until Russia completely implements all its commitments under the Minsk documents and restores respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- reiterated support to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and expressed their support for Ukraine's EU integration;
- recognising that all benefits from the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova would come once it they is fully implemented, underlined the importance of support to the process of reforms in Ukraine those countries, including reforms related to implementation of the Association Agreement as well as to preparation for implementation of its part on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area for Ukraine;
- underlining the importance of the upcoming EU Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga, expressed support for the expected deliverables of the Summit, especially in the area of mobility as well as support of the Euro-integration aspirations of the Partner countries.

## **Internal Security**

Prime Ministers:

- affirmed their determination to complete the practical execution of the signing trilateral Agreement to set up the Expert Coordination Committee in the field of public order and internal security

## **Baltic Border Control, Tax and Customs Cooperation**

Prime Ministers:

- welcomed the Customs Cooperation Action Plan 2014-2016, which defines in total more than 40 actions and sub-actions, expected outcomes and leading countr(ies)y in 4 main cooperation areas:

1. Alignment of customs control performance at the Eastern borders of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.
2. Common activities related to drawing up and submission of applications to the EU institutions for financing projects of common interest of the Baltic States
3. Cooperation between investigation units in the fight against customs offences
4. Cooperation in EU matters.

All actions/sub-actions have currently been carried out in time and successfully.

- underlined the integration of automated number plate recognition systems (ANPRS) of the Baltic States as a success story of the 2010-2013 Baltic customs cooperation..
- acknowledged the close cooperation of border control authorities of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the framework of Baltic Council of Ministers. At the same time stressed the need for continuous planning and conducting of joint operations in order to protect the EU's external border and ensure timely response to possible changes in the security environment.
- emphasised that special attention should be devoted to ensure that the external borders of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are properly equipped, and that effective mechanisms are developed for control of migration processes.
- recognised the need to continue developing cooperation initiatives under the Action Plan for Deepened Cooperation of Border Control and Customs Authorities of EU Baltic States for 2012-2016 and define new priority areas for cooperation by the end of year 2015.

## **Russia's ban on imports of agricultural products**

Prime Ministers:

-Shared the common understanding that a ban on imports of agricultural products imposed by Russia should be challenged by the EU in the WTO.

## **Social and Health**

Prime Ministers:

- 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 and expand cross-border coordination of emergency aid, as well as to develop other ways of cooperation in health area.

Next meeting of the Prime Ministers Council will be held during the Lithuanian presidency in 2015.

Laimdota Straujuma  
Prime Minister  
of the Republic of Latvia

Taavi Rõivas  
Prime Minister  
of the Republic of Estonia

Algirdas Butkevičius  
Prime Minister  
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Maardu, 5 December 2014