

Vihula Declaration

16 May 2025

On 16 May 2025, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Sweden, the member states of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, met in Vihula, Estonia, and agreed on the following:

1. We welcomed the report presented by Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves and Mr Gabrielius Landsbergis, nominated as high-level Wise Persons in accordance with the Porvoo Declaration of 14 June 2024. We agreed that the Wise Persons report adequately reflects the need to significantly reform and refocus the CBSS in order to effectively meet the challenge of the new security environment. This should happen through strengthening dialogue and cooperation on security, complement the work done in other relevant organisations, while avoiding unnecessary duplication.

We endorse the spirit of the report, and we hereby resolve and encourage the Presidency and the Secretariat to continue a process by which the workings of the Council are refocused accordingly.

The regional environment has changed significantly since the inception of the CBSS in 1992. All the ten members are now prosperous North European countries, all ten belong to NATO (in contrast to three in 1992), eight are EU members and two closely affiliated with the EU through the EEA (in contrast, only two were EU members in 1992). Russia was first suspended and then chose to leave the CBSS, leaving only members that are fully integrated into euro-Atlantic structures.

2. We condemned in the strongest terms Russia's illegal, unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, a CBSS Observer State, which constitutes a manifest violation of international law, including the UN Charter. We emphasized that Russia as the aggressor state and its accomplice Belarus and the individuals responsible must be held accountable for their crimes and must fully compensate for the damages caused. We called for further stepping up pressure on Russia and Belarus, including through the swift adoption of additional sanctions, stricter enforcement of the measures in force, and imposing tariffs on imports of goods that generate government revenue, to weaken Russia's capacity to continue waging its war of aggression. We supported further actions towards ending the dependency on energy imports from Russia, in line with REPowerEU, which should lead to phasing out Russian energy imports. We reiterated that sanctions against Russia must remain in force until a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the principles of international law, including the UN Charter, is reached.
3. We welcomed the disbursements made by the G7 and the European Union under the Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration (ERA) loan to Ukraine by using extraordinary revenues stemming from immobilized assets of the Russian Central Bank. We emphasized that Russian assets must remain immobilized until Russia ceases its war of aggression

against Ukraine and fully compensates for the damage it caused to Ukraine. We considered further exploring possible avenues to use Russian immobilized sovereign assets for the benefit of Ukraine, consistent with our respective legal systems and international law.

4. We reiterated our unwavering support to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We emphasized that respect for territorial integrity is a fundamental principle of international law. We stand by Ukraine as it exercises its inherent right to self-defence against Russia's war of aggression. We have collectively been among the largest providers of political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military, and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people. We underlined the urgency of stepping up and speeding up efforts to meet Ukraine's critical defence and financing needs, including by expediting the delivery of the planned support.
5. We reaffirmed our support for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the principles of international law, including the UN Charter, and underscored the principle that no initiative or decision concerning Ukraine be taken without Ukraine. We welcomed the efforts to reach a comprehensive ceasefire. We also highlighted the need for robust and credible security guarantees for Ukraine to deter future Russian aggression. We remain committed to supporting Ukraine's further European and Euro-Atlantic integration and steadfast progress toward European Union and NATO membership.
6. We reiterated that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has wider and more complex implications for the security environment in the Baltic Sea region and beyond. Russia's continued efforts to dismantle the existing European security architecture not only threatens the security of its immediate neighbours, but all member states of the European Union and NATO. This situation calls for further deepening of cooperation among democratic, like-minded countries to enhance security and territorial resilience in the region. We are paying particular attention to Russia's malign activities aimed at influencing and destabilizing democracies including through sabotage, cyber attacks, acts of violence, instrumentalization of migration, disinformation campaigns, intimidation, and election interference.
7. Russia's use of the so-called shadow fleet, making use of inadequately insured, aging vessels in substandard condition, poses a significant threat to maritime and environmental security in the Baltic Sea region, most of which has been designated by the IMO as a particularly sensitive sea area. This reprehensible practice aims to circumvent sanctions and entails a high risk of environmental disasters. It also jeopardizes the sensitive marine environment, increases risks connected to sea-dumped munitions, and substantially contributes to the funding of Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. We called for decisive steps to address actions, be they negligent or malicious, that threaten the Baltic Sea, including its critical maritime infrastructure and commended NATO Enhanced Vigilance Activity "Baltic Sentry" for improving situational awareness, deter, and respond to hostile and destabilizing activities in the region.
8. We welcomed the organization of the Meeting of Legal Advisers in Berlin on 27 February 2025 and of the Legal Conference on the Protection of Critical Underwater Infrastructure and the Inter-State Discussions on that issue, held in Tallinn on 3-4 April 2025, focusing on

the legal framework of protecting underwater infrastructure. The topics of the conference and Inter-State discussions were of great relevance for discussing the legal framework of protecting underwater infrastructure, and it is crucial to continue discussions on how to address the growing challenges to critical underwater infrastructure and strengthen the existing domestic and international legal framework.

9. We recognized that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. We encouraged all States to adopt the necessary laws and regulations to provide that the breaking or damage of submarine cables, pipelines or other critical underwater infrastructure done wilfully or through culpable negligence in the exclusive economic zones of other states or beneath the high seas shall be a punishable offence. We recalled the duty of flag States to effectively exercise jurisdiction and control in administrative, technical, and social matters over ships flying their flag, and emphasized that failure to comply with these obligations under the law of the sea can result in significant liability risks, particularly in cases where such non-compliance leads to serious environmental, economic, or other damage.
10. We also recognized the importance of international cooperation in the protection of critical underwater infrastructure, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts among States. We welcomed the EU Action Plan on Cable Security of February 2025 by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which sets out a whole resilience approach to detect, prevent, respond and recover, and deter disruptive incidents against submarine cables. We urged all States, in cooperation with the International Maritime Organization and other relevant international organizations and agencies, to improve the protection of submarine cables and pipelines and other critical underwater and offshore infrastructure by adopting measures, in accordance with international law, related to the prevention, reporting and investigation of acts intended at wilfully damaging such infrastructure and by implementing such measures through national legislation to ensure proper and adequate enforcement. We noted that in case flag States do not cooperate or fail to make such acts a punishable offence contrary to their obligations under the UNCLOS appropriate measures could be taken by coastal States affected to demand compensation by those flag States for any resulting damage, where appropriate. We recalled that coastal states have the right to take measures against activities within their jurisdiction that violate their rights under the UNCLOS.
11. We called upon all States to take measures to protect submarine cables and pipelines and to fully address issues related these cables and pipelines, in accordance with international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
12. We highlighted the role the CBSS has played as a forum for political dialogue on issues of common interest, as well as its contribution to advancing practical cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. We highly appreciated the substantial achievements of the CBSS's expert groups, networks and projects in strengthening the resilience and sustainability of the Baltic Sea region. In this context, we welcomed the close cooperation with Ukrainian partners, recognizing its contribution to strengthening regional security and fostering mutually beneficial collaboration between Ukraine and the Baltic Sea region.

13. We emphasized the valuable contribution of young people to decision-making processes concerning the future of the Baltic Sea region as well as their contribution to shaping a common and safe Europe – based on European values and the sense of belonging to the European project. We took note of the Youth Ministerial held in Tallinn on 4-7 May 2025, which focused on youth digitalisation and dangers of radicalisation, digital participation and youth accessibility in democratic processes, youth participation in civic security, and on empowering young voices in discussions on democracy, security, and participation. We also noted with appreciation the achievements of the Baltic Sea Region Youth Forum and encouraged all organisations, formats, and stakeholders in the region to involve the Forum as the platform for meaningful youth participation.
14. We underlined the importance of multi-level cooperation in the Baltic Sea region and the contribution of various organizations, formats, and networks in promoting effective practical cooperation, including, among others, the ongoing work of Ministers responsible for spatial planning and development within VASAB (Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea), which aims to improve territorial resilience in the Baltic Sea region. We also commended the work of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, which highlights issues of common concern in the region, and expressed our anticipation for an updated Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, aimed at strengthening practical cooperation in the area.
15. We expressed our gratitude to Estonia for its successful 2024 – 2025 Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and recognised the Permanent International Secretariat for its effective contribution to achieving CBSS's priorities. We welcomed Poland as the incoming CBSS Presidency from July 2025.