



Estonia



Latvia



Lithuania



Poland

# *Joint Declaration*

of

Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland  
on Building Strong and Resilient EU Regions  
Bordering Aggressor Countries



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- Recently, Europe has faced new and urgent complex challenges following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. This geopolitical situation has significantly impacted all EU regions; however, the effect of the war has knocked much louder on the doors of businesses, households and people in the EU Member States bordering aggressor countries. Due to our close geographic proximity to Russia and Belarus and unprovoked and unjustified full-scale Russia's invasion on Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland stand on the frontlines of safeguarding the EU's stability and prosperity against external threats.
- We encounter far more pronounced difficulties in deteriorated psychological well-being of inhabitants, face increased environmental risks and heightened challenges in coordinating environmental stewardship, hybrid threats, including instrumentalization of migration, growing number of informational and cyber-attacks, GPS disruptions, damages to energy and communication connections, disturbed movement of goods, services, people and capital, restrictions of the development of wind energy in border areas because of the interference with military radars, and terminated cross-border cooperation programmes. Yet, the list only captures a glimpse of the challenges we face due to the neighbourhood with Russia and Belarus and negative impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- In the light of the heightened threat of conventional military attacks, our defence spending allocated, as a percentage of GDP, ranks among the highest in the EU which, while imposing a considerable financial commitment, substantially fortifies security along the EU's external border. Therefore, we invest significantly in the protection of the border with Russia and Belarus (including the East Shield and the Baltic Defence Line projects). Our support to Ukraine is steadfast, with total bilateral government aid in a percentage of GDP ranks us at the top of Ukraine supporters.
- Moreover, since the beginning of the full-fledged war of aggression in Ukraine, we experience the weaker economic performance, inter alia, in terms of GDP growth, trade, increased caution of foreign investors, lower freight transportation and tourism flows. In 2023, the growth of our economies was lower than the EU average, while exports decreased by nearly twice the EU average. Additionally, in case of the Baltic states, geopolitical tensions with Russia and Belarus have led to their downgrade in the long-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings.
- These multifaceted challenges together with increasing depopulation trends threaten the cohesion within the EU and our social and economic development prospects, especially in the regions with lower economic potential which in most cases are on the external Eastern EU border. For this reason, it is extremely important to ensure adequate support, including financial one, for those regions and help them to avoid falling into development trap, thus maintaining the overall EU's competitiveness and convergence as well as security.
- Cohesion Policy is unquestionable as one of the cornerstones of the EU, promoting solidarity and development for every region. And in return, the EU regions contribute to increasing cohesion and integration of the whole EU. Given the current geopolitical and economic environment, Cohesion Policy support continues to play a crucial role in addressing challenges in question and keeping all the EU regions strong and resilient.



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- Therefore, additional and adequate incentives need to be foreseen in the financial envelope of Cohesion Policy post 2027 to address the challenges of economic and social convergence, resilience and security faced by our countries and regions bordering Russia and Belarus.
- The situation requires tailor-made solutions to bolster sectors that have been most disrupted in order to keep our economies and development on track, including well-being of inhabitants and availability of services. Moreover, the contribution of directly managed programmes is also highly important, as they have to provide complementary support for those regions in leveraging their full potential to contribute to the open strategic autonomy and prosperity of the Single Market. Additional attention should be placed on improving connectivity and mobility inside and between the Member States bordering Russia and Belarus as well as with the rest of the EU and preparing for potential environmental hazards. A dual-use approach to investments should be facilitated as would limit potential aggressor opportunities and protect citizens from danger.
- Finally, considering the hybrid threats, the prioritization of resilience and security is an imperative. It is crucial to dedicate greater focus to strengthening crisis preparedness and civil protection of our regions in post-2027 MFF.
- The European Union is as strong as its most vulnerable member. Being blind to the challenges faced by our regions may deepen regional disparities and jeopardize the competitiveness and security of the entire EU. We need to tackle these challenges in an appropriate and timely manner. Therefore, decent attention to regions bordering aggressor countries at the Eastern EU border is a key for Europe's success.

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**Safe and resilient border regions is safe and resilient Europe.**

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