

**SPEECH OF MR. GABRIELIUS LANDSBERGIS,
LITHUANIAN MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AT THE MINISTERIAL MEETING
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE BALTIC SEA STATES
KRISTIANSAND, NORWAY
MAY 25, 2022**

Dear Colleagues,

Let me start with thanking the Norwegian Presidency for the tremendous input into the history of the CBSS. Your leadership and your resolution in those challenging times is exemplary. And thank you, madam Minister, for this warm hospitality that you extended on us.

It was just several months ago, that I recorded these words for the CBSS 30th anniversary video:

„The situation in our region demands, more than ever, that all the CBSS Member States adhere to the common values: Respect for the rule of law, Democracy, Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. We reaffirmed our commitment to these values at the 2021 Ministerial Meeting, agreeing on a 10-year vision – named Vilnius Two Declaration – where all the ministers of foreign affairs agreed upon fostering mutual understanding, building trust, ensuring a safe & secure region and promoting people-to-people contacts.“

This was how we looked at the situation then – wishing to believe in the solid role of regional cooperation in taming wild appetites and hegemonistic behavior of one of our member states - Russia. We always looked at it with caution but also with certain hope, especially as concerns its society. This is what the founding fathers of the CBSS wanted us to do.

But it was just around the time we were ready to celebrate the 30th anniversary, that this member state – Russia - which we regarded an important part of our cooperation, showed its real face. It committed a murderous unprovoked attack on its neighbour Ukraine under absolutely false premises. And since then it continuously threatens to attack all of us and its other neighbours.

In this situation, how did we respond as a regional organization?

First, we suspended Russia and its accomplice Belarus from the activities of the CBSS.

Second, we continued the activities of the CBSS, despite Russia's feeble pretenses that the Baltic Sea regional cooperation without Russia makes no sense. We tried to help Russia integrate. Now our ways have parted drastically.

Third, we remained determined to continue. We have our agreed vision on how we want to see the Baltic Sea Region by 2030, and we are working on fulfilling it. Now another vision has been added to it – to see Ukraine free, democratic and sovereign. We are resolute in helping Ukraine to achieve that aim by using all the capacities available for the CBSS.

Fourth, I commend us on the declaration that we are going to adopt today, which is both our condemnation of the aggressor and our pledge to stand with Ukraine. It is also our commitment to continue and strengthen our regional cooperation for the sake of the safety, security and well-being of our region.

Finally, several days ago Russia informed us about its withdrawal from the CBSS. Well, this Russia as we know it today, will not be missed.

So, now we are facing the question – Quo vadis, the CBSS? To answer this question we have to go through once again the purpose of the organization and evaluate its meaning, its unique place in the Baltic Sea Region organizational network, and we have all the tools necessary for that, such as Vilnius II Declaration and CBSS Action Plan.

We have to go on with the strongest structures we have, our expert groups, reorienting some of their activities to assist Ukrainians in need. We are making plans on how to support Ukraine in its rebuilding activities. And we are looking for the ways to strengthen the long-term involvement of our Observer state Ukraine into the CBSS activities.

And though we will have full hands with our assistance to Ukraine, the Baltic Sea Region disappears nowhere. We still have the task to be in the lead of the activities of regional organizations, especially during this transitional time. I fully agree with the proposal that we should carefully evaluate all our options, our strengths and weaknesses during the year of the following German Presidency.

In my opinion we should continue with the CBSS. Our organization is needed in the Region as a platform of political discussion and practical cooperation. It is needed for the involvement of regional youth and its societies on the whole. It is needed for building regional identity. It might be also useful for re-involving the progressive element of the Russian society through our projects. Simultaneously, we should start a fundamental overview of the organization.

Russia is not a part of our group anymore. This is regrettable, but totally predictable. A new situation has been created, and it is our duty to use it for the best interests of the Region and our neighbours in urgent need.

Thank you.