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**Stability, Security, and Democracy
in Central and Eastern Europe**

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Introduction

The Eastern Europe Summit is taking place in Gdańsk, the historic birthplace of the Solidarność movement, a powerful symbol of civic courage, democratic awakening, and resistance against authoritarianism. This location reminds us that the struggle for freedom, rule of law, and human dignity is never complete, and each generation must carry it forward. Against the backdrop of growing geopolitical uncertainty, democratic backsliding, and hybrid security threats, the summit focuses on three interlinked themes that are crucial for the future of the region: **the role of youth and civil society in strengthening democracy and the rule of law, emerging security**

challenges in the Baltic Sea region, and Poland's role as a pillar of stability in Europe. These topics reflect the urgent need to empower young people as defenders of democratic values, to address the Baltic Sea's rising strategic importance amid hybrid threats, and to recognize Poland's responsibility as a key actor in ensuring regional security and European unity. By convening in Gdańsk, the summit seeks to draw inspiration from the legacy of Solidarność — proving that collective action, solidarity, and civic engagement remain the strongest foundations of a free and democratic Europe.

The Role of Youth and Civil Society in Strengthening Democracy and Rule of Law in Central Europe

Young people aged 18 to 30 make up 14.5 per cent of the Central European population¹, yet they constitute less than 3 per cent of the members of the national parliaments². This shows high underrepresentation in decision and policymaking. Nevertheless, the young generation is the one that will fight the consequences of challenges such as climate crisis, impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine or lasting corruption in the region. On top of that, underrepresentation jeopardizes liberal democracy, which is already under threat in Central Europe.

In order to strengthen democracy and rule of law in Central European countries and resist authoritarian tendencies, the role of the young generation is more important than ever. Eastern Europe is a specific region due to its past and the influence of authoritarian countries such as Russia aiming to weaken the region's democracy. For this reason, we are seeing authoritarian tendencies spreading. To stop this, and ensure European security, and defend democracy, resistance is important and the role of young people and civil society is critical.

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu>

² <https://data.ipu.org>

In order to strengthen the region's civic society in which the driving force is the European youth, we call for the following actions:

- 1. Civic and political education that reflects the challenges of our generation and provides the youth with a structural toolkit and basic knowledge on decision-making in their respective countries.**
- 2. Sustainable funding and free environment for NGOs and youth organisations that provide space for discussions and ideas tackling the alarming challenges of the young generation. States must ensure their active presence in policy-making and democratic processes.**
- 3. Strengthening cooperation among youth movements and organizations with the help of European institutions, for example, Iliauni Student Movement, along with others, is working to strengthen ties with democratic allies. This will strengthen the position of young people, provide them with better networking opportunities and support further actions to defend democracy and counter anti-EU propaganda.**

4. Stricter and concrete consequences on actors who violate the rule of law and act contrary to liberal democratic values. These shall include tougher EU sanctions on individuals, funding cuts and take all appropriate measures to protect the unity of the European Union.
5. Support for free media outlets (e.g. European Radio Liberty) in non-democratic countries funded from various reliable sources that would ensure access to independent sources of information. For example, in Georgia, 22 online media outlets from across the country have united to defend their shared right to free speech and democracy,

where support is crucial. Ensuring the existence of independent, free and often local sources of information is essential to create a safer and more protected environment for youth movements and civil societies. Equally important is the role of these outlets in showing what is happening inside non-democratic countries to audiences in Europe, raising awareness among citizens of democratic states and fostering solidarity across borders. The media is often one of the first targets of authoritarian regimes, so strengthening them and securing their independent existence is crucial.

The Baltic Sea: A Strategic Battleground – Cyber, Energy, and Security Challenges

Russia's hybrid military warfare is evident in its targeting of critical undersea infrastructure, aiming to destabilize regional security and challenge NATO's influence. There have been several suspicious incidents involving damage to around 11 pipelines and cables under the sea. These actions appear to be part of Russia's strategy to disrupt communication networks and supply lines, thereby destabilizing the region. They are deliberately designed to test NATO's response without triggering open conflict, while simultaneously challenging the resilience of the Baltic countries.

These efforts seek to intimidate the Baltic nations, hinder NATO's expansion, and probe how far Russian attacks can go before provoking a reaction from the West. By targeting cables running through the Baltic Sea, Russia is signaling that this key trade route for many Baltic countries is vulnerable, threatening their economies in the long term.

The hybrid tactics rely on regional divisions, fear of Russia, reluctance to invest heavily in maritime security, and Western countries underestimating the threat of Russian aggression. These factors contribute to inaction against the aggressor. Therefore, these threats must be addressed by demonstrating solidarity between Western European and Baltic nations, increasing invest-

ment in maritime and naval security in the Baltic Sea, and establishing a common NATO framework to respond effectively to the legally ambiguous actions that Russia is taking. This approach is essential to keep the Baltic Sea open for trade and ensure its safety.

We believe that:

- Russian hybrid aggression has made the Baltic Sea increasingly insecure. From GPS jamming to cutting of underground cables and possible sabotage of gas pipelines, the Baltic Sea has transformed from a historically safe maritime pathway to a high tension gray area battleground.
- The issue of Baltic Sea security needs to be addressed by the Baltic Sea countries with the support of the rest of the EU. The countries of the region are the main actors affected, and thus should be the main decision makers regarding security. However, they should not stand alone, but instead act with the weight of the Union behind them. Russia bets on division, and we need to call their bluff.
- It is crucial for the prosperity of the region to protect infrastructure, trade and energy routes.

- The Baltic Sea needs to remain open. Although there have been discussions of closing Russian trade through the sea, cutting their main export route in order to disrupt their economy, it is very likely that this will lead to a tit-for-tat response that would close all trade through the Sea and, in turn, cripple the economies of all the countries of the region. This must not happen.
- Responding to asymmetrical hybrid warfare costs money, but this is unavoidable as long as Russia poses a threat to the region.
- Hybrid attacks are still attacks and cannot remain unanswered. One of the major issues preventing this remains the identification of the perpetrators.

We call for:

- The littoral countries to take seriously and protect the security of the Baltic Sea .
- The EU and NATO to keep the co-operation between them formalized in the region.
- The execution of the EU Action Plan on Submarine Cables.
- EU and NATO to work on finding better ways of answering Russia's gray zone attacks.
- Serious investments in naval power and military infrastructure around the Baltic Sea, and a continuation of surveillance efforts such as Baltic Sentry.

Poland's Role in Europe: A Pillar of Stability in an Era of Uncertainty

Poland stands today at a historic crossroads. With its location at the heart of Central and Eastern Europe, its political weight within the European Union, and its close partnership with transatlantic allies, Poland carries a special responsibility in guiding Europe through an era marked by insecurity, democratic backsliding, and rising authoritarian threats.

Poland has emerged as one of the strongest economies in Central Europe, demonstrating resilience even during crises. As one of NATO's largest defense spenders relative to GDP, with over 4%, it has committed itself to strengthening regional security infrastructure³. This credibility is reinforced by its consistent and tangible support for Ukraine, not only through humanitarian assistance but also through military aid and diplomatic leadership.

Domestically, however, the polarisation and political tensions between the Prime Minister Tusk and the President Nawrocki risk undermining coherence in foreign policy. We strongly believe that Poland's capacity to lead externally must be grounded in domestic democratic stability, respect for the rule of law, and a clear rejection of authoritarian tendencies. The worrying rise of the far right in Poland and elsewhere

in Europe threatens to erode liberal democratic achievements and weaken the unity needed to confront external threats. Poland's leadership role cannot be understood in isolation. The situation in Hungary, Slovakia, and other neighboring states underscores the fragility of liberal democracy in the region. Precisely because some governments in the region drift away from European values, Poland must demonstrate by example what a resilient, democratic, and pro-European path looks like.

Across Poland's political spectrum, one consensus remains: Russia represents a direct security threat to Europe. This shared understanding provides an opportunity for Poland to take moral leadership on foreign policy, positioning itself as a defender of democratic sovereignty against outside authoritarian aggression. Poland has been one of Ukraine's strongest advocates and must continue to embody solidarity by action, not just by words. Its push for energy independence from Russia, including diversification of procurement and investment in renewables, also sets an example for other EU members. Strengthening regional cooperation with the Nordics and Baltics in defense matters enhances deterrence and ties Poland's security to that of like-minded democracies. At the same time, Poland should maintain its strategic partner-

³ <https://www.nato.int>

ship with the United States while advocating for stronger European defense systems. As one of the largest and most influential countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Poland must not only defend itself but also act as a guardian of collective European security. Its recently finished EU Presidency proved that security and defense will be a priority not only for Poland, but for the whole European Union.

To consolidate Poland's role as a pillar of stability, we call for:

- **Strengthening democracy and the rule of law in Poland** as the foundation of external credibility and stability.
- **Revitalizing the Weimar Triangle** as a key forum to bridge Western and Central Europe on security and integration.
- **Accelerating the construction of the East Shield Program** to safeguard the eastern flank of NATO and the EU.
- **Including Poland in all major international decision-making circles**, ensuring Central Europe is represented in shaping Europe's future, especially in peace talks regarding Ukraine and post-war reconstruction discussions.

- **A mediator role for Poland**, offering a strategic geographical perspective and amplifying regional interests at the European and global level.
- **Supporting EU enlargement**, by sharing Poland's transformation experience with candidate countries and ensuring they follow liberal democratic reforms.
- **Following Poland's example by focusing urgently on EU energy independence and European-level security of supply**, reducing reliance on authoritarian regimes.

The coming years will test Europe's ability to withstand external pressure and internal fragmentation. Poland, with its history, resources, and democratic aspirations, can be a pillar of stability for Central and Eastern Europe and the whole continent. To fulfill this mission, it must strengthen democracy internally, reject authoritarian temptations, and stand firm in liberal solidarity with its neighbors.

As young liberals from Central and Eastern Europe, we call upon Poland to lead by example: to be not only a defender of borders, but also a defender of values, rights, and freedoms. Only then can Poland secure its place as a true leader in Europe during these uncertain times.



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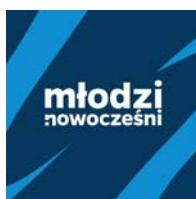
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