

## **PEACE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION DEPENDS ON SECURING THE EASTERN BORDER**

Parliamentarians of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) from Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden visited EU's easternmost border in Vartius, Finland on April 29<sup>th</sup> to emphasize the need for a more comprehensive approach to security, readiness, cooperation, and countering hybrid threats on local, national, and regional levels within the Baltic Sea region.

At Vartius Border Station in Kuhmo on the Eastern Finnish border, the delegates were given a firsthand look at the operational complexities of managing EU's external border. The Finnish Border Guard exemplified a proactive approach toward safeguarding national borders, emphasizing the importance of regional cooperation in combating geopolitical threats.

The delegates also gained insight on April 30<sup>th</sup> about the role Kainuu Brigade plays in readiness and in training personnel to form units for the defense of northern parts of Finland.

The members of the visiting delegation stressed that the easternmost EU border needs to be secured not only against hybrid warfare – as was the case of an instrumentalized and coordinated refugee inflow – but also against all military threats.

Reflecting on the insight gained, the participating parliamentarians underscored **the urgent need for a joint and coordinated border defense approach. They emphasized that the EU's eastern border is a shared responsibility that demands raised awareness, stronger focus, and better and closer cooperation of all democratic states of the Baltic Sea Region and the European Union, particularly in the face of Russia's ongoing aggression and increasing threats.**

**Considering recent geopolitical developments, the participating parliamentarians see governments need to prioritize developing a coordinated strategy to defend our common border, societies, and their infrastructure more effectively. They stress that the European Union should consider border security in the east as a priority and allocate necessary resources to bolster cooperation and readiness in the Baltic Sea region.**

In this context, the announcement made by the EU Commission President during her visit to the Finnish border in Lappeenranta on 19 April 2024 that the EU will support Finland with 230 million euros and operational assistance from the EU border protection agency Frontex by sending border guards and surveillance equipment to Finland, is seen as an essential step that must now be implemented.

The discussions and findings of this visit to EU's easternmost border complement the detailed deliberations of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference Working Group on Energy Security, Self-sustainability, Resilience and Connectivity (WG ESSRC) on 18 March 2024 with several Finnish security experts in Helsinki, which dealt in depth with issues relating to the protection of critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea, particularly in the energy sector.

The members of the BSPC Standing Committee involved in the visit intend to inform the BSPC Standing Committee in detail about their findings and discussions during its meeting on 9-10 June 2024 on the Faroe Islands so that the Standing Committee can deal with the issue in greater depth at this meeting based on the knowledge gained.

Furthermore, the parliamentarians involved in the visit aim to incorporate the results of this visit into this year's Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, which will take place under the Danish Presidency from 25 to 27 August 2024 in Helsingør. The annual conference's heading is "Safety in the Baltic Sea Region". Defence will be a crucial topic at this conference.