



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.  
Central Europe



# THE BALTIC VISION 35 YEARS OF PROGRESS, UNITY, AND RESILIENCE

**UP!**  
for democracy

**POSITION PAPER**

Judit Zengővári for FNF x Fine Acts



# Imprint

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## Authors

Junge Liberale (DE) , Attistibai Youth (LV), CUB Junior (MD), Estonian Reform Party Youth (EE), European Youth of Ukraine (UA), IFLRY (DE), Jungfreisinnige Schweiz (CH), JUNOS (A), Lithuanian Liberal Youth (LT), Mladi Nowoczesni (PL), Svensk Ugdом (FIN), USR Tineret (RO), Young Progressive Slovakia (SK), ZeMolodizhka (UA).

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## Notes

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## Introduction

With two decades having passed since the Baltic nations joined the EU, it is indeed a momentous occasion for a timely reflection on the region's journey towards integration and self-determination within the European framework. Additionally, as we commemorate 35 years since the Baltic Way - a powerful demonstration of solidarity and resilience - we are reminded of the region's enduring quest for sovereignty and self-determination.

Against the backdrop of these historic anniversaries, our discussions will extend beyond mere reflection, delving into the pressing issues that define the Baltic region's contemporary reality. Central to our agenda is the imperative of securing sovereignty in the face of external pressures, particularly Russia's assertive regional influence. As geopolitical dynamics continue to evolve, it is essential to fortify the Baltic nations' resilience and autonomy, ensuring that their voices are heard and their interests protected on the international stage.

Furthermore, as the Baltic region faces the dual challenges of environmental sustainability and economic development, fostering sustainable economic models becomes paramount. With Estonia poised to discuss its first climate law in autumn, our conversations will delve into the intersection of environmental policy and economic growth, charting a course towards a more sustainable and resilient future for Baltic economies.

Taking all of this into consideration, this year's Summit centers on reflecting on two decades of EU membership, addressing historical events like the Baltic Way, and exploring economic models for sustainable growth.

# I. Reflecting on 20 Years of EU Membership : Achievements, Challenges, and Future Prospects

At the beginning of 2004, Estonia, along with several other Eastern European countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary, became part of the European Union, representing the first wave of accession of Eastern European countries. This wave followed continuous processes and reforms that spanned over more than a decade, later followed by the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. Their accession took longer as they required additional reforms in the judiciary and in combating corruption, marking a new chapter in their economic and political development and the beginning of a period of European integration for the Eastern bloc. For these countries, EU membership and regional integration provided an unprecedented opportunity to modernise, strengthen their economies, and ensure greater political stability.

Two decades later, the impact of EU membership is evident in sectors such as education, transport infrastructure, and energy. EU cohesion funds have been crucial, enabling these countries to modernise infrastructure, promote innovation, and boost competitiveness. Cross-border projects like Rail Baltica and energy transitions have further strengthened regional cooperation. However, Eastern European countries must continue upholding EU values and addressing regional and EU-wide challenges.

Therefore, we demand:

- The implementation of the Euro in all Eastern European countries

Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania should demonstrate the implementation of clear steps leading to adopting the single currency. The EU should actively supervise this process and encourage the member states to speed up the process. It is crucial to conduct educational campaigns to debunk the myths about the euro, especially the most common ones used by populist groups.

- Improvement of the EU narrative within the Eastern European Countries and an active fight against Euroscepticism

Over the last couple of years, the region of Eastern Europe has witnessed the rise of eurosceptic features in various political parties that undermine the power and importance of the EU and its institutions in the member states and the world. Thus, the role of liberal parties should also be to tackle such narratives and actively work on raising awareness about the EU and its importance for the region.

- Strengthening of the rule of law

Breaches of the rule of law, particularly in Hungary and Slovakia, need urgent EU action. Solutions should go beyond funding cuts, focusing on legislative improvements and better enforcement.

- The EU to work on institutional adjustments to ensure a smooth process of Ukraine joining the Union.

The EU must adjust its institutional framework for Ukraine's potential membership. Gradual integration, starting with sectors like energy and the digital economy, would help align Ukraine's laws with EU standards ahead of full membership. Joint EU-Ukrainian committees could aid this process.

## II. Securing Sovereignty: 35 Years Since the Baltic Way Revolution and Addressing Russia's Regional Influence

It has been 35 years since the Baltic states gained independence from the former Soviet Union. The Baltic States have been at the forefront of rapid democratisation and economic growth. Today, they are a role model for a smooth transition into the European Union. Even though there is a great majority of EU-favourable opinion and a western approach to geopolitics, the cultural aspects may not be as independent from Russian influence. Furthermore, Russia has a strong interest in the political state of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. This interest is realised through multiple hybrid forms of attacks, which this paper discusses.

We identified three core aspects in which the sovereignty of the Baltics and the entirety of Eastern Europe are endangered. The sovereignty of the Baltics and Eastern Europe are mainly threatened through information war and influence through language as a weaponised soft power instrument - we sum those two aspects up as abuse of cultural power. A second key aspect is the threat of resilience of infrastructure by sabotage, interference and espionage. This goes from telecommunication infrastructure to energy grids and much more. As a third aspect, we identified the very direct threat of the physical security of the region through military and hybrid war actions that originated from Russian soil.

## 1 - Culture

The Baltic countries have worked to reduce Russian influence, but cultural ties remain strong. Since the war against Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have promoted alternatives to Russian entertainment and language, though Russian influence persists. In Estonia, Russian-language literature reflects the experience of the Russian minority, creating cultural divisions. In Latvia and Lithuania, many still admire Russian art and media. Despite progress in distancing from Soviet influence, Russian propaganda continues to spread through online platforms like YouTube and TikTok, using divisive narratives. Engagement with Russian content has surged, reaching 13 million interactions per day by 2024.

## 2 - Infrastructure

Russia's influence in the Baltics and Eastern Europe includes efforts to destabilise critical infrastructure. Four key areas of interference are:

1. GPS Jamming: Suspected Russian jamming in the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea disrupts navigation and communication, violating international law and risking public safety. It affects civil aviation and navigation, hindering economic growth.
2. Electricity Grid: The region's reliance on the Russian grid threatens energy resilience. Disconnecting from it is essential to ensure a stable and independent energy supply.
3. Cyberattacks: Russia targets banks, government institutions, media, and infrastructure to cause disruption and insecurity. Notable are the 2007 cyberattacks on Estonia, which crippled key institutions through DoS and DDoS attacks traced to Russian servers.
4. Sabotage of Undersea Cables: These crucial data-transfer lines in the Baltic Sea are vulnerable to interference, from espionage to destruction, threatening modern communication networks.



### 3 - Security

Europe faces complex security threats from both hybrid and conventional attacks, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine affecting not only Ukraine but also neighbouring countries like Latvia and Poland. A Russian UAV recently impacted Latvian soil, and a missile entered Polish airspace, causing a fatality. Additionally, Belarus and Russia have used migrants as tools of hybrid warfare, pushing them to EU borders to destabilise and polarise society.

We propose the following:

- **NATO Response:** NATO must respond to any Russian missile or UAV entering member airspace. There are also frequent reports of unidentified aircraft from Kaliningrad violating Baltic airspace, which NATO forces must detect and escort.
- **Countering Espionage and Hybrid Warfare:** NATO must strengthen its security services with top-tier technical capabilities and training. Legal frameworks must be updated to ensure efficient detection and counteraction of threats.
- **Increased Research Funding:** European nations should boost financial support for research on resilience in military, cyber, and societal sectors.
- **Strengthening EU Border Agencies:** Agencies like Frontex should receive more financial and structural support to efficiently limit illegal migration and prevent Russia and Belarus from exploiting the situation, while upholding human rights.

### III. Fostering Sustainable Economic Models: Charting the Future of Baltic Economies

The Baltic economies, like many others, face the challenge of balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability. As fossil resources become scarce and their environmental impact grows, countries must transition to more sustainable models. A circular economy offers a solution, emphasising resource efficiency and minimising waste by keeping materials in use longer. This model also reduces dependence on imported raw materials, such as oil and gas, often sourced from authoritarian regimes.

A circular economy is more than just recycling; it requires rethinking the entire production and consumption cycle. This involves designing longer-lasting products, reshaping supply chains, and transforming consumption patterns. For the Baltic economies, this shift could drive innovation, create new industries, and reduce their environmental footprint.

By adopting circular economy practices, the Baltic nations can lead by example, showing how modern economies can grow without depleting finite resources. This policy paper will explore strategies for implementing circular economy models in the region to foster sustainable development across borders.

#### Consumer-based solutions

- Incentive setting
- Public Education
- Communication & Public space awareness raising

#### Business-based solutions

- Tax cuts
- Waste export restrictions
- E-commerce regulation
- Construction waste

## Public-sector based solutions

- creating thermal power plants
- Recycling norms
- Cross-border deposit scheme

We call for:

- Regulating Plastic Waste:

We advocate for a global plastic agreement to standardise recycling and propose banning EU waste exports to countries with poor recycling standards. We also call for stricter enforcement and harsher penalties for illegal ocean waste disposal through updates to the Marpol agreement.

- Reducing Individual Waste:

A waste incentive system that rewards households and businesses that reduce their waste output. Financial incentives or reduced waste management fees would encourage responsible consumption and recycling, fostering sustainable behaviour and reducing environmental impact.

- E-Commerce Waste:

To combat wasteful e-commerce practices, we propose measures that discourage excessive shipping, unsustainable packaging, and the disposal of returned goods. A market-based solution includes tax cuts for recycled packaging and surcharges for non-recycled materials, encouraging businesses to adopt sustainable practices.

- Recycling Standards:

To make recycling economically viable, recycled materials must compete fairly with new ones. We advocate for standardised quality requirements for recycled materials, ensuring their use in all settings, including food packaging, if hygiene standards are met.

- Cross-Border Bottle Deposit Scheme:

A unified EU-wide Bottle Deposit System for plastic, glass, and cans, encouraging returns and promoting recycling. A harmonised system across member states will improve efficiency, reduce litter, and support the circular economy.

- Circular Economy in Trade Agreements:

Circular economy principles to be embedded in future trade agreements, promoting sustainable production, recycling, and waste reduction across supply chains. This will foster global cooperation on resource efficiency and drive innovation without hindering economic growth.

- Restricting Imports of Non-Recyclable Goods:

Uniform sustainability and recyclability standards for all products entering the EU, ensuring they meet the same requirements as EU-produced goods. This will encourage responsible production, reduce waste, and protect consumers.

- Investing in Waste-to-Energy (WTE) Plants:

Significant investments in WTE plants across the Baltics and the EU. These facilities would divert waste from landfills, reduce environmental impact, and provide renewable energy by turning waste into power, helping to reduce methane emissions.



Junge Liberale (DE)

Jaunieši  
\_attīstībai®

Attistibai Youth (LV)



Coaliția pentru Unitate și  
Bunăstare (CUB) Junior (MDA)



Young Progressive Slovakia  
(SVK)



European Youth of Ukraine (UA)



International Federation of  
Liberal Youth (IFLRY)  
(DE)



MEHR FREIHEIT. WENIGER STAAT.  
PLUS DE LIBERTÉ. MOINS D'ÉTAT.

Jungfreisinnige Schweiz  
(CH)

JUNOS

Junge Liberale NEOS (A)



Lithuanian Liberal Youth (LT)



USR Tineret (RO)



Estonian Reform Party  
Youth (EE)



ZeMolodizhka (UA)



Nowoczesna  
Young (PL)



Svensk Ungdom (FIN)