



1991-2016 AND THE WAY AHEAD

In 2016, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the restoration of independence of the three Baltic States and the re-establishment of regular, multifaceted Baltic-Nordic cooperation ties.

A quarter of a century is an important milestone calling for reflection and evaluation:

How far has the cooperation advanced? What is its track record? What achievements has it yielded? And, perhaps most pertinent of all, where do we want to go from here and how do we envisage our next twenty-five years together?

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To ponder and discuss issues such as these, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia and the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia summoned a high-level roundtable “**1991-2016 and the Way Ahead**” on 22 August 2016, held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia. The lineup of main speakers consisted of distinguished politicians with a solid commitment to Nordic-Baltic cooperation:

H.E. Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs,

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia;

Mr. Dagfinn Høybråten,

Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers;

Mr. Petras Auštrevičius,

Member of the European Parliament, Lithuania;

Mr. Carl Bildt,

former Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden;

Mr. Uffe Ellemann-Jensen,

former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark;

Mr. Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson,

former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iceland;

Mr. Jüri Luik,

Director of the International Centre of Defence and Security,
former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defence of Estonia;

Mr. Kimmo Sasi,

former Minister of European Affairs and Foreign Trade of Finland;

Mr. Michael Tetzschner,

Member of Parliament of Norway

Interventions were also made
by the following guests:

Mr. Tomas Bertelman,

former Ambassador of Sweden to Latvia (2000-2003);

former Ambassador of Sweden to Russia (2009-2012)

Ms. Elita Cakule,

Head of International Department at the Association of Local and Regional Authorities in Oslo

Ms. Rikke Helms,

first director of the Danish Cultural Institute in Latvia

H.E. Ms. Kirsten Malling Biering,

Ambassador of Denmark to France; first resident ambassador in Latvia (1991-1995)

Mr. Michael Metz Mørch,

Secretary General of the Danish Cultural Institute; former Ambassador to Latvia (1995-1999)

Mr. Karlis Neretnieks,

Major General (ret.); member of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences;

member of the Latvian Society of Generals

Mr. René Nyberg,

former Ambassador and East Office CEO; author of “Finland and Nordic Security”

Mr. Artis Pabriks,

Member of the European Parliament;

former Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Minister of Defence

Mr. Romualds Ražuks,

member of Latvian Parliament and Baltic Assembly

Mr. Veiko Spolītis,

member of Latvian Parliament and Baltic Assembly

Mr. Jānis Vucāns,

member of Latvian Parliament, President of the Baltic Assembly and

Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

The roundtable was moderated by the Associate Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Latvia, **Mr. Daunis Auers**, who has written and commented extensively on Baltic and Baltic-Nordic relations and is the author of “Comparative Politics and Government of the Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the 21st Century” (2015).

The discussion was divided into two thematic blocks:

1. key achievements and lessons learnt from the last twenty-five years of Baltic-Nordic cooperation,
2. current challenges of the Baltic-Nordic cooperation and ambitions for the future.

Each part began with an initial round of remarks by the moderator and the main guest speakers, followed by interventions and queries from the invited guests. The general public was able to follow the discussion online via live streaming.

The following transcript presents the discussion in its entirety, save for minor editing of primarily grammatical character.



CONCORDIA RES PARVAE CRESCUNT

МУСОНОВИЧЪ МЪСОНОВИЧЪ



Edgars Rinkēvičs

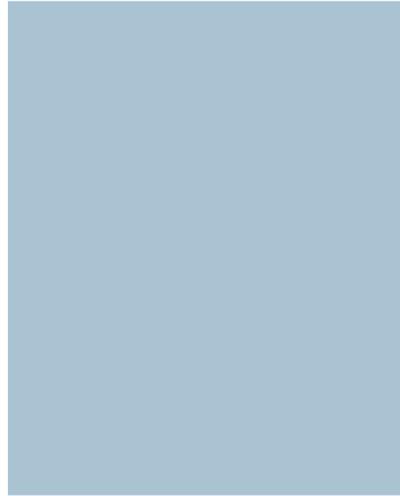
Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Latvia

The last 25 years have been those of incredible transformation for the Baltic countries and for the Nordic-Baltic region as a whole. We remember with appreciation the vivid moments of early political courage of our closest neighbours in the Nordic countries. Their role being among the first to recognize our restored independence and re-establish diplomatic ties was instrumental. The Offices of the Nordic Council of Ministers in the Baltic capitals have since been very important in strengthening our people-to-people, economic and cultural ties.

Our achievements are rooted in close collaboration on the basis of shared democratic values. Today our region is in leading positions in terms of economic development and innovations in Europe. Our region is interlinked through various organizations – the European Union and NATO, and the Nordic-Baltic Eight, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Northern Dimension, and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, and more.

Inspired by the road walked together so far and by our ceaseless cooperation, I am certain that we are well equipped to tackle challenges to the security of our region and to the future of Europe. I am optimistic about our region's resilience and pragmatic approach in being a positive force here and beyond.

I am grateful to the prominent participants of the High Level Round Table for the fruitful discussion. I hope that this publication offers readers a chance to reminisce, experience appreciation and draw inspiration for strengthened cooperation of the NB8 in the future.



Dagfinn Høybråten

Secretary General
Nordic Council of Ministers

Twenty-five years is a long time for a human being. However, in terms of creating stable political systems and building sustainable national states a quarter of a century is only a beginning. Historically speaking, the Nordic countries are young states which, similar to their counterparts in the Baltics, arose from popular will and have relied on the fundament of popular sovereignty.

Newly independent states are usually the first to appreciate the benefits of international cooperation, and the Baltic countries have demonstrated it commendably. Your commitment to the networks of regional, European and global collaboration has been unwavering, and your achievements over the twenty-five years of statehood have been impressive.

In 2016, the Offices of the Nordic Council of Ministers in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania celebrate their 25th anniversary. Over the years, the offices have been instrumental in facilitating cooperation between the Nordic and Baltic countries. Numerous contacts have been established and discussions about our common Nordic-Baltic values – democratic development, human rights, rule of law, sustainable development, equality, among others – have been abundant.

Given my conviction that international cooperation is crucial for prosperity, democracy, stability and development, I am sure that good Baltic-Nordic relations will remain of utmost importance.

A close, innovative and flexible cooperation over the coming twenty-five years and beyond will reinforce our common position and strengthen our role in the future European and global context. It is a win-win scenario, for the Nordic and Baltic countries alike.





Auers:

Excellencies, Minister Rinkēvičs, ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to today's high-level roundtable marking the 25th anniversary of Baltic-Nordic cooperation. I will give the first word to our host today – the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Latvia, Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs.

Rinkēvičs:

Thank you very much, and very warm welcome to all our friends from the Baltic and Nordic countries! I am really delighted to see our very good old friends who had been supporting us even before this very important date – before 1991, before we restored our independence. I don't want to make any specific recognitions but three names definitely need to be mentioned. One is the former Foreign Minister of Iceland, Mr Hannibalsson, who has been a really great supporter throughout our entire fight for independence, also with Iceland being the first country recognising the restored independence of the Baltic States. I also want to specifically mark Mr Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, who has also been a great supporter on behalf of Denmark. And the great representative of civil society, Mr Carl Bildt, who used to be the Prime Minister and also the Foreign Minister of Sweden. But I don't want to make very long introductory remarks, I just want to outline a couple of points. Today we will be discussing – and I very much look forward to fresh words of wisdom from all of you – what we have achieved in our cooperation in the format of Nordic-Baltic countries. I think that if we look back historically, the Baltic States started from a kind of ground zero, building their defence capabilities, and as a former Secretary of State of the Defence Ministry I want to acknowledge all the support we received in building our defence forces, in building our defence capabilities and also in enhancing the Baltic defence cooperation.



The Nordic countries have been instrumental in assisting in the reform process – be it economy, be it the political system.

But also the Nordic Council of Ministers has been really prominent in fostering education and cultural exchange as well as people-to-people contacts. So far about history. But I think that we are here not only in order to reflect on what great things we have achieved so far but also [to speak about] the way forward, the next twenty-five years. And here I believe that under the current circumstances, with a challenging situation in the East, challenges in the European Union, with the big elephant in the room called Brexit, I think that we also need to reflect on what would be the role of our cooperation as Nordic-Baltic countries within the European Union – addressing the challenges when it comes to security, when it comes to the future of Europe, when it comes to our own destinies. If we speak about future cooperation, I want to outline a couple of things.

Twenty-five years ago it was very much about a Nordic tier and a Baltic tier, and then gradually we were working on putting the Nordic-Baltic concept together.

Even now, after 2014, after all the events in Ukraine, with all the mounting security challenges in the Baltic Sea Region, we sometimes refer to a kind of “Baltic security problem”. I think that we need to understand that we are actually building a common Nordic-Baltic security community to some extent, even though there is NB6 in NATO and NB6 in the EU and even though there is an ongoing debate on how to increase the security cooperation among the Nordic and Baltic countries within the framework of NATO and within the framework of the EU. Also I want to underline that we are building an energy community. The projects we started a couple of years ago, like the Finnish-Estonian electricity link, the Swedish-Lithuanian electricity link, are forging our joint energy community and assisting the Baltic States in overcoming, at least partly, their energy dependency. I think that we are also building to some extent a joint economic community as well as a digital community. If we look at the statistics, all the eight countries are actually among the fastest growing economies in Europe. All the data I have from OECD and the World Economic Forum shows that we are the most innovative region, but there are still many things to do in order to fortify it. I very much look forward to today’s discussion as a discussion of reflection, as a discussion of how great we are but also as a discussion of what we should do in future in order to become an even more coherent region and to become a region that is probably one of the most progressive, most innovative regions in Europe. I hope I haven’t taken up too much time – I’m also exercising a little bit for tomorrow’s visit of the Vice President of the United States Mr Biden, so I’m trying to get into the right tone. Thank you very much!

Auers:

Thank you, Mr Rinkēvičs! I am the ‘bad guy’ to Mr Rinkēvičs’s ‘good guy’ – I am the moderator here, to try to impose some discipline on our discussion. As you should know, the discussion is divided into two halves. In the first part of our discussion we want to reflect on the last quarter century of Nordic-Baltic cooperation: on the events, of course, twenty-five years ago but also on how this cooperation has developed over these twenty-five years. The second half of the discussion will be forward-looking – that will be the moment to address the challenges that Mr Rinkēvičs outlined and the moment to think about how we as a region can best deal with these challenges, what we should look like going forwards. Initially I’ll give the word to each of our eight panellists here. They know that they have three minutes – and, of course, all new phones have stop-watches fitted on them. I warn you about this – it’s an open question as to whether I know how to actually operate the stop watch but let us presume that the threat is there... So we have three minutes per speaker, and then we open up the table to questions, to comments, to reflections from our distinguished guests in the hall. And then we move on to the second part of the discussion. So to begin our discussion I’ll pass the baton over to Mr Dagfinn Høybråten, the Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Høybråten:

Thank you very much, mister moderator and Your Excellency Foreign Minister Rinkēvičs, for your kind words and welcome, and also for setting the stage for this fantastic gathering of history and actual politics! I am representing the Nordic Council of Ministers as its Secretary General and my reflections on the key achievements and the lessons learned will be as follows. The beginning of the 1990s was a period of geopolitical sea change in our part of the world. Thanks to a solid will and support of the people, together with deft manoeuvring of the Popular Fronts in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania the situation could be used to regain independence and freedom. From the Nordic horizon, we followed this process with great concern, and some of you around the table here were in responsible positions at that time. In the fall of 1990 the Nordic Council, the parliamentarians, and the Nordic Council of Ministers, the governments, agreed to establish Nordic information offices in the three Baltic States. Consequently, the offices were opened in Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius already in the spring of 1991, before any of the Nordic embassies were established here. In the early years the Nordic-Baltic cooperation concentrated on building networks, promoting Nordic culture and social welfare solutions and supporting the development of democracy and its institutions in all the three Baltic States.



In the period surrounding the Baltic States’ accession into the EU in 2004, the Nordic-Baltic cooperation evolved into an endeavour based on equal terms, and it also took on a more structured character.

Joint long-term guidelines were adopted, expressing the central areas and priorities of cooperation: good governance, social welfare, equality, environment, sustainable development, cross-border cooperation, research and so on. I think it’s fair to say that over these twenty-five years questions have been asked, whether the Nordic presence in the Baltic

States should remain the way it has been over the years. But every time we assessed the situation, every time we asked those questions – and those questions need to be asked from time to time – the answer was yes, there is work to do, there is a cooperation to develop, there is a mutual interest, and over these years the cooperation has developed into a mutual and balanced one. So now, looking back on the twenty-five years, I think it’s fair to claim that the Nordic-Baltic cooperation has been a great success story. Thousands of cooperative activities have been carried out in a variety of areas, like social welfare, equality, fight against trafficking, sustainability, culture, et cetera. Many of those efforts have resulted in and continue to yield rich dividends in terms of mutual benefit, networks, people getting to know each other through working together and so on. This applies not least to the so-called mobility programs and the NGO support programs – I am happy to see the civil society so prominently represented here today – which have enabled an enormous exchange of knowledge in the fields of culture, business, state administration and civil society.

So what we see is a consistent learning curve that has taken us from a juvenile to a mature stage of cooperation, which I think also points to a future progress.

I’ll come back to the future, but let me say that at this stage I think no one really questions the relevance of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation and the presence of the Nordic Council of Ministers in one way or another in these countries. I think we have seen that it makes a lot of sense – and it makes sense in a new way today. Thank you very much so far.



Auers:

Ok, thank you! And now that our co-hosts have spoken I will switch to alphabetical order. So I will now ask Mr Petras Auštrevičius from Lithuania, who is a member of the European Parliament and was, I gather, at one point – and perhaps still is – the youngest ever ambassador for Lithuania.

Auštrevičius:

Yes, indeed, I was given a historical chance. Ladies and gentlemen, good day to everybody, and thank you very much for inviting me! Sitting among so prominent political and historical figures who've been personally present at making decisions which changed the destiny of the Nordic and Baltic region is indeed a privilege and an opportunity. I must remind you that **the Iron Curtain first went down in the Baltic Region – it was a process that started here, not somewhere else.**

And it's important, since we defeated the empire of evil. Not everybody is happy with the defeat of this empire or with cracking down the Iron Curtain – we hear some voices that wish to rebuild it – but I think we will do everything that's in our power not to see it rising once again. The Baltic Sea in fact transformed itself, and the region itself, from being divided into being united. For the Baltics, the Nordic countries were an excellent example of everything. There was a very strong political and social narrative in our societies in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, saying – what would our countries have been like if we had developed as our more lucky neighbours in the West or North-West? In fact, the expectations were very high, with a hope that in ten or twenty years we might reach the level of the Nordic countries. Well, socially and economically it didn't happen but politically, and by joining the organisations we wished to be part of in order to establish ourselves as normal Western democratic and liberal societies, it did happen. So we have to congratulate ourselves and our partners on everything we have achieved. It was, indeed, an excellent cooperation, not just a success story. I would say even more –

it's a historical achievement by the countries which were forbidden from cooperating but which went on to become excellent natural and very efficient partners.

I assess the Nordic-Baltic cooperation as complementary and as a win-win situation. Complementary, since the Baltics were able to adopt a lot of ready-made experience – we didn't have to look far for the examples of good governance, stable democracy and solid political fundamentals. The Nordics for us represented something that we could look at, learn from their good example and transfer it into our societies. For the Nordics it was a chance to create a stable environment, a stable neighbourhood – like-minded neighbours, if you wish. If you look at the different regions in Europe, I think the Nordic-Baltic region is an extremely good example – probably the best one in Europe – and what the South-East of Europe was very much lacking. What you had here was two parties which were willing and able to cooperate. Well, once we have been given support, which was so important at that time, now we, the Baltics, have to do our job. Look, the Nordics helped us at the right time –

now the Baltics are doing their job helping the Eastern Partnership countries so that they can reach a higher level of cooperation and integration with Western societies.

And I don't see any end to the Nordic-Baltic cooperation! With the accession to the EU we've acquired NB6 – I see a lot of positives in it and I hope that this cooperation will not lead us to Euroscepticism with regard to the enlargement of the Nordic-Baltic region. I hope it will never happen. Thank you!



Auers:

And now we'll skip over to somebody who's already been introduced several times. Former Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and, most importantly, our representative of the NGO community today – Mr Bildt.

Bildt:

Thank you very much! It's very important that the civil society is amply represented. My NGO consists of myself – but that's fairly usual in the NGO community, according to my experience... It's been a quarter of a century that has gone better than many of us feared – perhaps even expected – if we go back to that period of time. If you look at what happened twenty-five years ago, it was of course the *formal* re-establishment of independence – due to what happened in Moscow, primarily, which should not be forgotten. That was the easy part of it! Then came the gradual re-establishment of more real independence: the troop withdrawal, the withdrawal of other structures, some of the complicated issues with citizenship and things like that which needed to be put in place for the newly re-emerged states to be truly stable. And then, in order for them to get more stability, followed gradual integration in all the structures of Nordic, European, Atlantic and global integration – with the Nordic Council, of course, being the most important, but also the European Union, NATO, the eurozone, OECD, you name it.

And today we have a situation where the three Baltic States are, as a matter of fact, the most Western-integrated parts of the entire Nordic-Baltic region.

That has to do both with the economic necessity but also, of course, with the security imperative due to the geopolitical, strategic situation. And it should also be added, of course, and which was mentioned by Edgars – the energy, the financial, the trade links, which are part of this particular picture. That's the good part of the story. What, then, didn't work? Well... Uffe Ellemann, for example, was among the advocates of a new Hanseatic League which we were dreaming about – with the Baltics coming back as the new avenue for trade, integration and cooperation between the wider West and the wider East, with the latter being primarily Russia. We might have been naïve, or we might have been dreaming, or whatever happened but we had great expectations there. It would've been extremely important for the three Baltic States to achieve a historical position, for example, for this particular town.

That did not materialise, and instead of going into a new Hansa we have entered a far more complicated period in our relationship with the East.

If we look at the structures of integration and cooperation in the Nordic-Baltic region, which is supposed to be the focus of our discussion here, I think that these last twenty-five years have been the years of – at best – stagnation of Nordic cooperation. That has to do with the fact, of course, that if you take the previous periods – 1950s, 1960s, 1970s primarily – the Nordic cooperation was what we had. That was the focus of what the Nordic countries did! We should not forget, for example, that it took some time for Finland to become a full-fledged part of the Nordic cooperation – these are the things that have been nearly forgotten by now. But then from the early and mid-1990s, of course, the focus from Sweden and Finland primarily shifted fairly rapidly to European integration. And the failure of the referendum in Norway in 1995 was, of course, a setback to the idea of us together working within the European context. Nordic-Baltic [cooperation] has, of course, gradually established itself somewhat better – primarily, I think, in the area of foreign affairs, and to some extent security affairs as well. It has become an area of foreign policy, and whether we call it NB8 or NB6 is not of primary importance in this particular respect. And also in the field of security a lot of things have been happening, be it inside or outside of the formal networks. If we look ahead, briefly... Since 2008 and primarily since 2014 – it's a new and much more complicated world. So when we look ahead, it will be more difficult in virtually every respect in the South, in the East and in the West.

The revisionism in the East is clearly something that is troubling but I would say that populism and fragmentation in the West might be something that is an even greater threat to what we could be able to achieve in the future.

And in view of these developments, more troubling and more demanding, I think there is a reason to think anew about the necessity of both Nordic and Nordic-Baltic cooperation in a lot of areas in the years ahead.



Auers:

Thank you, Mr Bildt! Now, if I'm doing a poor job of moderating this, I wash my hands off it. The fault of that would actually lie with Mr Ellemann-Jensen – for one simple reason. Much of a reason why I am living in Latvia is that I spent the first twelve years of my time living in Latvia when I moved here in the early 1990s working for the EuroFaculty – a project that was founded by Mr Ellemann-Jensen and Hans-Dietrich Genscher in 1992-93. So if I'm doing a poor job, please go up afterwards and speak to Mr Ellemann-Jensen and leave me alone – it's not my fault.

Ellemann-Jensen:

Thank you! Well, so far you have done perfectly well and I'm checking on my iPhone to see if you have found out how to work it... Alright. Strolling down the memory lane... This day, twenty-five years ago, was Thursday. It was the day after some of us – I think Jon Baldvin and I were the only ones present here – we had a meeting of the NATO foreign ministers in Brussels. And we were told in the late afternoon by the then Secretary General Manfred Wörner that he had just had Yeltsin on the telephone and that he had said: "Hello guys, I'm in control! Don't worry, things will go in the right direction." And when I came home to my house in Copenhagen, Jānis Jurkāns¹ was sitting there – he had slipped out of Riga, I don't know how, and he had a mandate to establish a government in exile should things go the wrong way. Instead we could share a bottle of champagne! On Thursday all the thinking started – how to use this window of opportunity ahead of us.

Now, if I had said at that time that twenty-five years from now the three Baltic countries would all be members of the larger European transatlantic family – NATO, EU, etc. –

and not only members but as Carl Bildt pointed out members without caveats, members without all the exceptions that countries like Sweden and Denmark unfortunately are dragging around with... If I had said that at the time, people would have deemed me crazy! Because even though our dreams were very, very high they were not *that* high. And yet, here we are! And this is why I say to those who sometimes despair and say – well, there's still a long way to go before we reach the point that was once famously described I think by Toomas Hendrik Ilves – "our dream is to become yet another boring Nordic country"... Alright, there is still some way to go but considering what has been achieved during this period there is no limit as to where we can go! And the Nordic-Baltic cooperation – it has improved, and there are many ways in which it should be further improved. When we come to the second part, that of the future, we are indeed facing some challenges that really, really ask from all of us to try to think about our possibilities in a totally new way. But looking back, I think all of us can feel a rather smug satisfaction.



Auers:

Splendid, and exactly three minutes! Now I hand it over to Mr Jon Baldvin Hannibalsson, who was, of course, the Foreign Minister of Iceland at the time that Iceland became the first state to recognise Latvia's renewed sovereignty twenty-five years ago today, I believe.

Hannibalsson:

Thank you very much! Referring to Toomas Hendrik Ilves's dream about all of us becoming yet another boring Nordic country, which was his statement of policy, I must in fairness let you know that he has withdrawn it. He has said that Estonia now is far away in terms of innovation and technical entrepreneurship than any of those old and boring Nordic countries. So what can we learn from our common experience of a quarter of a century, if anything? What have been the achievements?

The Baltic road to freedom was not merely a reassertion of national identity or sovereignty – it was also a democratic revolution.

Some of us suspected at the time that it would be more – that it could be the beginning of the end of that great totalitarian monster called the Soviet Union, which turned out to be the case. So it had not only a regional significance but truly a global one. What can we learn from it? The leaders of the West of that time might advisedly ask themselves – could we learn something from our mistake in how we reacted to those momentous events? What am I talking about? I am saying that the leaders of the West at the time were so completely preoccupied with what was called the end of the Cold War, with negotiations with the Secretary General of the Communist Party Mr Gorbachev, that gradually, without thinking, it became the Western policy, the mainstream mantra – don't say anything, don't do anything that might risk Gorbachev being deposed because then the bad guys, the communists – the real communists – would come back. This was the actual policy! And it should not be forgotten that your leaders, the leaders of independence, when they knocked on the doors of Western leaders at the time, expecting, of course, to be embraced as new members of the family of European democracies, were in for a rather rude shock. They were not embraced, no! They were admonished, they were warned – don't you dare rock the boat and please don't become the peace spoilers. In other words, postpone, compromise, settle for something else, something less, without preconditions. The putsch attempt in Moscow disproved it. The hardliners did turn Gorbachev out – they tried and they failed, and they did not take over. And after that the Western policy – if it can be called policy – was actually in tatters. What can *they* learn from this, now that Europe is in a total mess?

Of course, that you should never ever place the hope for success of your policy on the single fate of a political personality – an adversary, a friend or whoever.

Never! It's a fatal elemental mistake. Never, never do it again! That's one thing for them to learn – I mean, those who are in the leading positions in the West. The achievements? I agree with my friend Uffe Ellemann – we would not have dreamt of it in 1991, meaning that this would become quite the success story it has turned out to be. Compare it to Ukraine! That would be enough, basically. Look at the mess there! Why did you succeed and the Ukrainians failed so miserably? Well...

My understanding is that across the political spectrum here there was a basic general acceptance of a long-term goal – the consolidation of the newly born fragile democracy by joining the European family of nations in the European Union, yes, and taking out a rational security policy by joining NATO,

which is a transatlantic security alliance. And it meant that your political leaders left, right or centre had learnt their lessons from history and had drawn the right conclusions. Those goals gave the guiding lines, the principles that were enough to thwart any adventurism along the way. It served as a fundamental principle, a plan of action, which led to your success. Now, the bottom line is this – you joined the family of nations, you joined the European project at a time when we had high hopes for its future. Now, when it is in a mess, it is your turn to try to help us putting it back on course again.



Auers:

Thank you! And now we'll move to neighbouring Estonia, to Mr Jüri Luik – a diplomat, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, a former Minister of Defence and currently the director of the International Centre of Defence and Security.

Luik:

Thank you very much! And thank you, Minister Rinkēvičs, for inviting me and the colleagues. What can one say in three minutes about the history? A lot of old war stories I suppose, but I will not focus on these...

I think it is very important to keep in mind that the Nordic-Baltic cooperation regarding the regaining of independence of the Baltic States started far beyond, or far before, the sort of nominal creation of our states,

which you then supported in many different ways. Everybody around this table, using the means they had, some being in NATO, some being outside NATO but having very strong sort of NGO and party-political affiliations which allowed to support the Baltic States – the Finns being occasionally in a very complicated political situation but putting enormous money to help us through the NGOs... I mean, this was a whole network of cooperation, which I think was fundamental for the Baltic nations actually managing to create what are now the three independent countries. The second point I would make is – I mean, let's be honest,

the efforts of the Nordic countries to support Baltic independence and to support our fragile independent countries were also very much dependent on the security interests of the Nordic countries.

I mean, it wasn't a kind of pure selflessness, although clearly one of the aims was the destruction of the Cold War structure around the Baltic Sea Region – breaking up that structure, avoiding the three Baltic territories serving as a springboard for Cold War-type action. I mean, during the Cold War the Baltic Sea was effectively a lake – very much an internal lake of the Warsaw Pact with respect to the two countries also located around the Baltic Sea... So it was a possibility to break it, and I think it was of an utmost importance to all the Nordic countries. And, finally, the role of the Nordic states in knowing the Baltic situation but at the same time knowing well your partners in the West, the big Western powers – I mean, it was clear that it was not enough to help us with your own weight but that you had to bring the weight of the major European powers and the United States to the play...

So in an interesting way you were both our advocates in the 'big' countries, explaining our issues and also our concerns, our worries, while at the same time you were the advocates of those 'big' countries in the Baltic States. Because we were fundamentally suspicious of the motives of the big powers in doing almost anything!

So your coming to the Baltic States and trying to hone out a compromise on many of these complicated issues I think played a very crucial role. I personally felt it during the complicated issue of negotiating the withdrawal of Russian troops. I mean, for instance, Carl Bildt played a crucial role. I am also very happy to see here Lars Fredén and Tomas Bertelman, who as part of Carl's team played a crucial role. And I knew, as a negotiator, that they had a direct contact with the White House and that they were capable of bringing me valuable knowledge of what they believed was going on. Obviously, I had my own contacts with the White House so I was able to check what you were telling me... But I think you made an excellent job of helping us. As to the future, I will come back to it later. Thank you!



Auers:

Splendid. Ok, and now we move on to Mr Kimmo Sasi, a former President of the Nordic Council and also a former Minister of European Affairs and Foreign Trade of Finland.

Sasi:

Thank you, Mister Chairman. Honourable friends... I think there are three major achievements of the last twenty-five years. First, we have made the Baltic Sea not a dividing line but a line of cooperation, and the NB8 cooperation is very important. In Finland we constantly have to fight whether we belong to the West or the East – and the Nordic family, being a cornerstone of Western cooperation, has brought us to the West. And

I think it is very important that there is this brand of Nordic-Baltic cooperation,

linking the Baltic States to the Nordic states and to the Western cooperation. I think this message has to be sent to Mr Trump as well, so that he knows where we are today. The second thing is membership in the European Union. I remember that when we were preparing the Helsinki Summit in 1999 it was not at all clear that the Baltic States would be on board. Some were afraid that if those countries joined, it would inflate German influence and that it would be very costly. However, we were able to convince everyone that at least one of the Baltic States can be – or must be – a member, because it would give a wrong signal to Russia if there were no Baltic States on board. Finally, as a compromise, all the applicant countries except Romania and Bulgaria were taken on board as negotiating partners, which was very good. And I think that, indeed, puts the Baltic States in the right family, in the right house today. And the third thing – Baltic Sea as an economic area, which we have spoken about since the beginning of the 1990s and which has brought quite a lot of Nordic investments to the Baltic States. It has also been some kind of a guarantee that there is a level playing field which is fair to all companies, and it has been very helpful for the growth of economy.

We have to remember that as long as there is well-being and growth in economy people are satisfied and the development can go in the right direction.

As to the lessons learned... I think that what we have in common is the Hansa period and the same historical roots, which I think is very important. It is very important that we teach the youth in all our countries about the common roots of our history. And the second thing is... The beginnings of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation were marked by great enthusiasm. In the middle of the 1990s, I remember, we established three committees in the Nordic Council: one for the European affairs, one for cooperation with the neighbouring countries and a third one for the Nordic affairs. I happened to be the chairman of the second one, the Committee for Cooperation with Bordering Areas. But then, five-six years later, that committee was disbanded because we had gone back to the Nordic affairs. The feeling was that progress had been achieved and that there was no more pressure. But we have to remember – we have to fight for the change all the time, and I think we have to do something to strengthen the cooperation between the Nordic countries and the Baltic countries, to which I will come back later on. Thank you.



Auers:

Ok, thank you! To close the first tour de table, we have from Norway Mr Micheal Tetzschner, member of the Parliament of Norway.

Tetzschner:

Thank you! I will start by reminding us of all the remarkable achievements made by the Baltic States in the last twenty-five years. From my personal experience, I remember my first visit to the Baltic area, to Vilnius. I had to apply for a visa at the Soviet Embassy in Oslo. The purpose of my visit was to extend political contacts, to Vilnius and Lithuania in particular. It was because the Norwegian government was somewhat unsure as to how react to the independence movement at that time. It was easier for them to recognise the Baltic States on the level of counties, so I was assigned by the city government of Oslo to be the first ice-breaker. Last time I visited Riga nobody asked for my passport, so great progress has been made.

We must also admit that in the post-war period the democratic states had a lot of other concerns apart from the fate of the minority states within the Soviet Union. I think we should reflect on how easily we forgot the suppression of the Baltic States – it was not on the table, it was not discussed.

It is a part of the real politics which the small states have to cope with. So in this part I would like to conclude that what we must do now is work intensively together to be assured that history never repeats itself. We will learn from our hard-earned experience to ensure that we do not repeat the same failure as before. And we also have to remember that we in the Western part of the world had put self-imposed restraints on our discussions, lest we should provoke the Soviet Union. Thank you!



Auers:

Thank you! And at this point we would like to open up the discussion more broadly into the hall, for reflections, comments, even questions. My only consideration would be to keep it brief and to introduce yourself. So... ah, of course, Mr Pabriks!

Pabriks:

I do not represent any NGO yet, just the European Parliament... The big picture which these great men have been painting here today is like a kaleidoscope – it consists of very small stones and each of them illuminates something important. I would like to use this opportunity and thank all of them for what they have done for my own ‘small piece’ – particularly Uffe Ellemann, who did not know me at that time. Thanks to the Nordic countries I had a chance to become maybe the first PhD in political science in all the three Baltic countries, studying in Aarhus for five years. I left Latvia exactly during those events, in January 1991. I would say that, just like in Daunis’s case, you are responsible for who we have become and how much we have been contributing to politics, academia and other fields. So these twenty-five years have not been, as we would say it here, totally wasted. But, of course, what we have not discussed here so far... I think it is important what Carl mentioned – the big danger is our fragmentation and populism. Because

for the Baltic States the fragmentation of those achievements – membership of the EU, membership of NATO, the global order and the institutions which were strengthened over the last decades – for us it is different than for other Western European or Nordic countries. For us it is an existential threat, an existential issue.

So if we can find a way, as Baltics and Nordics together, to at least stand against this fragmentation – to at least stand against this populism which is increasingly taking over the West – that would probably be one of our duties as sane countries and sane people. So I think this is where we have to do something. Thank you!



Auers:

Thank you, Artis! Although you were dipping your toes into the waters of the future, which we were trying to sort of keep to the second half of the discussion... but I understand the context there. But mostly we would like to keep this part of the discussion for the reflections on the last twenty-five years or the events of twenty-five years ago. So again, I open up the table.

Biering:

Thank you very much! My name is Kirsten Biering, and I was the first Danish ambassador to Latvia. When we look at what actually happened twenty-five years ago, and also now entering into the issue of populism, I think I would like to underline something which really struck me about the Danish profile when I arrived here. Of course, when the Nordic countries engaged very much in the defence of the Baltic States it had to do to some extent with security. But looking at the Danish profile there were certainly also – and I think this is important when we now discuss populism – there was a true element of altruism in what the Danes did.

I think there was a feeling very much in Denmark that, you know, the fate of the Baltic States could have been our own, had it not gone differently after the Second World War. And that paved the way for an enormous popular support,

which again translated itself into a popular involvement in a multitude of engagements and activities in this country. This also spilled over into other areas and into, for example, the area of security and the withdrawal of the Russian troops, where the Danish role was perhaps very much under the radar but, again in very practical terms, broadly based on the involvement of all Danish ministries – also paving the way, for example, for the rehousing of Russian soldiers in St Petersburg. That popular involvement and that sort of intense involvement in Nordic-Baltic issues is perhaps something that you would miss a bit today. There was an enormous dynamic fibre in the Nordic-Baltic environment. I am today ambassador to Paris, so it is a bit far off from my day-to-day work, but one would wish that even though things have, of course, become ‘normal and boring’, that we could somehow return to that more dynamic fibre of Nordic-Baltic cooperation – whether that is up to the Nordics or Baltics or both of us. Thank you!



Auers:

Thank you. Veiko?

Spolītis:

Yes. Veiko Spolītis, MP from Latvia. As soon as populism was touched here upon... There is one issue that is popping up here in Latvia now – it is a question which is recurring here again and again, about the treatment of the Soviet soldiers and the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. So using this opportunity when Carl is here... The troops had to be withdrawn from all the three Baltic States but obviously the situation was different in Estonia and

Latvia. Now one hears from some populist corners here and in Estonia, but particularly in Latvia, that actually the West had pressured us to make those military personnel stay here. We know retrospectively now that Estonia and Latvia dealt legally differently with the Russian personnel. What recollections do you have? What can you say, looking twenty-five years back on these moments? How was the situation dealt with in Estonia and Latvia?

Bildt:

Well, ask Lars Fredén, who probably has more detailed recollections of it... And Jüri as well. It was a question of withdrawal of a couple of different things. First you had the withdrawal of active Soviet army units. That went fairly smoothly. At some point in time I think the general staff in Moscow decided that they needed these troops elsewhere, so the regular forces were withdrawn. The most significant regular forces were in Lithuania – Lithuania was the key thing. And there it happened before the others, strangely enough, so the sort of regular withdrawal went fairly ok. Then we had, which was **the sensitive issue** in your countries, particularly in Latvia, the pensioners. Because under the Soviet military system, if you had been an officer for x number of years, I think you had the right to be a pensioner in Latvia – and they thought that Latvia was a nice place, rightly so. And here it was a very complicated discussion that ended up in a compromise, which was not very popular I think in Latvia but where I took the view anyhow that at some point in time also these people are likely to die, which most people do. So it

was a temporary issue that was going to fade away over time, and I think that is what broadly turned out to be true.

The third issue was the question of strategic installations, which was very sensitive. The problem was that when we looked at it some of them were – at least one of them was – important for objective reasons. Paldiski, for example, was a training facility for those who were sort of running the Soviet nuclear submarines. We had an objective interest in that even Russia would have a proper training facility for its nuclear submarines – those running the reactors. Until they had an alternative facility to train their nuclear submarine crews, there was an objective Western stability interest in the Russians retaining Paldiski. So we had a five-six years' long transition period I think – right, Jüri?

Luik:

We had one year.

Pabriks:

Skrunda had three.

Bildt:

Yes, true, Skrunda was the other one. Yes, but then the commander was allowed to be in Paldiski for some time, right? No, but it's true, it was shorter. It was Skrunda that had a five-year period – the old facility of Skrunda, it has to be said. One critical question which I was asking in those days when talking with people in Russia – the friends that we had there and to some extent still have – was: “Do you really accept the independence of the Baltic States? Do you see it as just some kind of a historical thing that will pass or do you truly understand that these countries want to be independent and will remain independent?” And I remember that even sort of democratic friends that we had were not very clear in their answer those days. Boris Nemtsov, a good friend – in the beginning he said: “No, no question about that. It is a temporary thing.” I would say that one of the achievements of the last twenty-five years is that this attitude has changed. Needless to say, there are dangerous movements in Russia nowadays but

I think the fact that the three Baltic States are independent, truly, has been broadly established with the Russian political culture for the foreseeable future. And if that is the case, that is truly important from the historical point of view.



Auers:

Thank you! Are there any more further comments? Yes, Jānis!

Vucāns:

Jānis Vucāns, member of the Parliament of Latvia and also the President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. We spoke here today a lot about the NB8 format, but to my mind also this Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference is a very important format of cooperation. And if, at the beginning, there were the Baltic countries and the Nordic countries, now we are together and we have partners in this organization coming from Russia and even Germany. And the discussions about the past and the future of the Baltic Sea area are not always easy. But I would like to mention one very important key factor from our past... Daunis mentioned the EuroFaculty, and if we look at this table we see at least four or five of us who have been educated in this system. To my mind,

this first reform of the higher education coming from the EuroFaculty was very, very effective and very important for the Baltic countries.

Myself, I am coming from an academic environment and I have participated in the reconstruction of the economic field in Latvia; Daunis participated in the political field, together with Veiko and partly Artis... To my mind, at least for Latvia this was a very important step – to educate our young generation in this tradition of Western education system. Looking into the future... I know that there will be another part of discussion, but we also need to think about this education and research aspect – it is very important for the Baltic countries. Thank you!



Auers:

I thank you, Jānis, for reminding us about the social dimension of integration. We have one more comment down there...

Helms:

My name is Rikke Helms, and I was earlier representing the Danish Cultural Institute, having established the first such institute in the Baltic countries in 1990. I am very happy to be invited, thank you! I just wanted to add a little bit to what Kirsten Biering was saying about the people's involvement in this process that was going on.

The Danish Cultural Institute was, in fact, established from the donations by the Danish people and also by people here in Latvia – there were donors from Latvia too.

I would just say that... You have now been talking about the meaning and the importance of education, and I would say that cultural links are very, very important too. I just saw that when we were the first ones to open, people came running and we had our first people-to-people connections – through cultural and educational, and folk educational links. And I am a very, very strong believer in the great power of people-to-people connections and in culture as a 'third leg' of the foreign policy, as the Danish Cultural Institute is now formulating it. So I think this should be kept in mind. Thank you!

Auers:

Thank you! And I think with that we'll bring an end to the first part of our discussion... Oh, was there one more? Maybe in a second half. So we'll turn to the second half now, which is... The aim here is for us to be rather more forward looking – to consider some of the challenges, which have already been brought up by the Minister and by others here at the table. In the immediate sense we have, of course, Brexit, rising population, the challenge of migration... In the long run we have things such as rising inequality in Northern Europe, we have sluggish economic growth, and, of course, the great security challenge coming from the East. So in your remarks now I'd like you to be a little more forward looking and to think about how Nordic-Baltic cooperation can deal with these challenges – whether we need more Nordic-Baltic cooperation, whether we need a different kind of Nordic-Baltic cooperation and whether it is sufficient for dealing with these issues. So we'll go in the same order as we did the first time round, and I'll immediately pass over to Mr Dagfinn Høybråten.

Høybråten:

Thank you very much, mister moderator! It's been truly useful to listen to this conversation – there's a lot to learn. I would like to emphasize one revelation from what has been said about the development of cooperation – the fact that the Baltic States today are *the* most integrated in Europe and that you really have overtaken the Nordic countries in this respect. I think there is a challenge in this but there is also an opportunity when dealing with the fragmentation and populism in Europe. Staying integrated and becoming more integrated is something that should be on the minds of Nordic as well as Baltic leaders.

Regional integration is not a threat to a wider Europe – an integration – it's actually a strength that can build a stronger Europe.

I think NB8 is the right format to do so. And with the NB6 in the European setting and the NB6 in the NATO setting there is a potential for supplementation and synergy, which I know is already being made use of but I think it can still be utilized even more. Looking at the Nordic Council of Ministers and its role in the Nordic-Baltic cooperation, I feel that it's more important now than ever. But it's also time to take stock and see whether we are doing it in the right way and what the essential goals are. We seek both to consolidate our accumulated gains and to explore new territories. I would like to mention here a few examples out of the basket. We have lately cooperated in various ways in order to promote the development of independent and investigative media in the Baltic States. This has materialized, for instance, in the support for training courses in investigative journalism here in Latvia and for the independent TV channel ETV+ in Estonia, and also for other, more broadly oriented projects on media literacy. We are also providing support for the development of democracy festivals in the Baltic countries of Latvia and Estonia, which have been inspired by the major political meetings in the Nordic countries, such as the renowned Almedalen and, more recently, Bornholm. So I think these are also ways to build on the people-to-people links and the socially engaged populations in our countries. When it comes to the societal security, it is another issue of growing topicality – it is about resilience, which means the ability to prevent, manage and recover from a wide range of non-military threats against the democratic system, critical infrastructure and social cohesion. I think that there is a lot to build on but also a lot to learn from each other in the Nordic-Baltic cooperation in this respect. Geopolitical factors were one of the decisive reasons behind the establishment of the Nordic offices in 1991.

Today the geopolitical situation in our part of the world is again characterized by uncertainty, complexity and apprehension, and therefore we need to remember that the core values of our cooperation are based on security, solidarity and joint progress.

So we are not only in the same boat – we are around the same sea, we have so much in common also in terms of the context we are operating in. So if you believe that international regional cooperation is an indispensable instrument for dialogue and for promoting joint security, economic growth and welfare, it is hard to see why the Nordic-Baltic cooperation should *not* be continued with a high degree of relevance. I can assure you that on the part of the Nordic governments this is a clear priority – going forward. I know it is appreciated by the Baltic governments, and together I think we can continue on this path of pursuing joint efforts and common interests.

Auers:

Thank you! And now – Mr Auštrevičius.

Auštrevičius:

Security and stability are back on the regional agenda, and we can see the reasons behind it. I don't see any contradiction here with more cooperation with pro-democratic forces in Russia.

I hope there are still some of them left – very fragile, very individualized as they are, we still have to invest lots of our attention and time and resources in order to keep those individuals and institutions afloat. And, finally – strengthening regional identity. We do not have to invent a common language – we understand each other perfectly well already – but we should have something more going on in literature!

Literature prizes, joint competitions, which would explain our history not through the lips of politicians but through the writings, through culture – and, indeed, people-to-people contacts.

Keeping any homophobia away from our region would be great, so let's invest into that as much as possible. Thank you.

Auers:

Thank you! And Mr Bildt.

Bildt:

Speaking of challenges, I think for the three Baltic States they are primarily economic and demographic. There has been convergence, no question about that, but it has 'converged' in the sense of slowing down, particularly since 2008. There is no longer the convergence that we were hoping for – that the three Baltic States gradually, within the foreseeable future would be able to catch up with the Nordic standards. That's not where we are at the moment but that's where we and you must be, also in order to overcome the demographic challenges in your countries – and, it has to be said, even more so further to the east. The security challenges are back in focus, primarily since 2014 or 2008, however you want to look at that... But I would say that it is related to managing two things. First, which I mentioned, is the unity of the West. As long as the unity and the strength of the West is more or less assured the security challenges are manageable. When there is fragmentation of the West, all bets are off, regarding both the future of the European Union but also to some extent of NATO. It has also to do, finally, also with the coherence of your societies. I don't think it is an acute issue though. It has been managed rather well, it must be said, but I think it is an issue that should always be something that is in focus and not forgotten. So with the unity of the West and with the coherence of your societies I think the security challenges should be manageable and the focus should lie on economic and demographic challenges, where more efforts are needed.



Auers:

Ok, thank you!

And Mr Ellemann-Jensen.

Ellemann-Jensen:

Thank you! Reflecting on the past could easily lead us to complacency, and if you look around in the world this is certainly not the time for it. Just look at what's happening! Brexit has changed the balance in Europe, not least landing a former dishonest journalist a job at the UK Foreign Office. You see nationalists raving around in the Netherlands, in France, in some new democracies in Eastern Europe... You have Donald Trump attracting support from a surprisingly large number of people in the United States – a Trump that by Anne Applebaum was described this morning as “an American version of a Russian oligarch”. And then you have Putin moving around – nothing more to be said about him... The challenges that we are facing right now do call for some healthy minds. Now, if the Brexit materializes – I still regard it as an ‘if’, because I fail to see how it could be possible in practice... But *if* it materializes,

there is going to be some interesting new balance in the powers of voting in the European Council. And if you start calculating on that, you will suddenly see that the NB6 in the EU will possess some interesting numbers in that mathematics,

which could give us a possibility to push forward initiatives – and to stop initiatives from others. We are surely going to miss the Brits, if it comes to the Brexit, because we look in the same way as they do on things like free trade, security policy, etc. And these are the areas where we see a danger that things might be moving in the wrong direction, unless we in our group put our act together and start combining the forces we will have there.

It would require from this group of countries to be much more practical in coordinating policies in, first of all, the European Union, when it comes to key areas such as preserving free trade and defending external borders so that

we can get back to open borders. You know, using a passport to get into Sweden – I haven't done that since I was a boy and visited it for the first time in 1951! Fortunately, I have got a passport in the capacity of an honorary ambassador of Skåne to the European Union – which they do accept, strangely... But we all share an interest in getting back to normal. Dealing with security issues, the threats from Russia – well, this has to do with keeping in check all the Putin-Verstehers that you see moving from Berlin to Moscow these days, some of them even in government positions, telling Putin – alright, just relax, just keep pushing and we will all get back to normal. We have a joint opportunity and a joint responsibility to make sure that the EU does behave. Now, energy policy... All this discussion about the Nord Stream 2 – what is the right response to that? It is to push for the establishment of a joint energy community! Already with the Nord Stream 1 –

tell me, why did we not make sure that the so-called Amber pipeline was built from Germany through Poland to the Baltic countries?

No doubt, a lot of ‘grease’ was paid out – some German politicians were bribed, others were bribed probably as well... We'll have to get to the bottom of this and push together for the establishment of a joint energy policy! There are so many things that remain to be done and that *can* be done if we put our act together. So the future is going to be very interesting!

Auers:

Thank you! And maybe Mr Hannibals-son can tell us some more about this interesting future?

Hannibalsson:

To my mind, it makes very little sense to enter into a long discussion of Baltic-Nordic cooperation unless we concentrate on the bigger picture. During the last few weeks I was a little bit on the road, visiting academic circles, think tanks in Germany, France, Spain... And I must admit that I am surprised at the level of denial of the seriousness of Europe's problems. Number one – the European Monetary Union is a failure! It was meant to be the high point of integration, of bringing nations together but it has become technically a non-workable instrument and, politically, it is bringing nations apart. The so-called ‘solution’, the austerity, is a failure too, being worse than the disease it is meant to treat. Financially Europe is in a prolonged economic recession – the economic performance of Europe is miserable! Even Germany is stagnating now.

The financial system that was shaken by the 2008-2009 crisis is still unreformed and, basically, it has overgrown the real economy to such an extent that it has become an instrument for continued and exacerbating inequality,

which at the political level is absolutely unacceptable. Look at Spain, with its level of young people's unemployment approaching 50%! And they are still taking pride in having gone through this austerity policy in three years and in having reduced the overall level of unemployment from 26% to 23%... What a miserable performance! We should not be surprised that there is a deep undercurrent of political battlers at an impotent leadership which doesn't face the problems and doesn't have any solutions! And in that sense, as I said in my previous talk, is it too much to ask that the leadership in the West should learn from the mistakes they made way back in 1991 when dealing with the political transformation going on then? The European leadership is not dealing with the problems – they are in a state of denial. If you look across the sea to America, you actually see a man – an ignorant blabbering, bullying psychopath – who has taken over the party of Lincoln. But one thing which he says is indeed true – Europe is taking a free ride in the defense and security system vis-à-vis the United States. This is true!

There are a few honourable exceptions but in general Europe is not dealing with its common threat, and the transatlantic alliance in that sense is in an open danger.

Imagine if this man whom I was describing actually becomes the president of the United States. What sort of consequences would it have? Disastrous! Why is this not taken seriously?! Why are we just mumbling about that we will somehow muddle through, with our tiny solutions here and there? Europe is in a mess! That's it. Now you have to fix it!



Mr Jüri Luik
Director of the Estonian Centre of Defence and Security
Estonia

Mr Jón Baldvin Hannibálsson
Iceland

Auers:

Ok, thank you for describing our interesting future... Mr Luik, perhaps you have some answers as to how Nordic and Baltic cooperation can deal with this?

Luik:

I don't know about the answers but let me focus on security issues. It is no secret that the new resurgent Russia has changed the rules of the security game around the Baltic Sea. But I think

we also have to keep in mind that NATO, as a reaction to Russia's movements, has changed its own posture too when it comes to the Baltic Sea Region.

I mean, when you think of it, by bringing its allied troops to the region and to the Baltic States NATO is actually doing something revolutionary! Obviously, there are no allied troops in Sweden and Finland but let's remember that there are no allied troops in Denmark and Norway either. So it's really a kind of a push forward. I think it is very important, and I believe it has a positive effect, a stabilizing effect for the whole region. But I also believe that

it is very important that we have a very detailed and continuous security dialogue so that we understand each other's motives, exchange information, share concerns etc. so that we can help each other in these complicated issues of security today.

And also, which I think is very important and greatly underestimated – now that NATO has moved forward I am sure that president Putin will be more inclined to use other kinds of peace initiatives, quite different from his previous 'realistic' Cold War-fashion approach. Putin might be open to various peace initiatives – but not necessarily *real* peace initiatives but propaganda peace initiatives. So I think it is very important that we have a continuous dialogue even on that front. For instance, let's take the latest important issue on the table, the infamous flying without the transponders. The initiative put forth by the Finnish President was I would say hijacked by Putin, who is using it for basically his own ends in order to split the Western community. I think it is very important that also in those terms we would have very close contacts and very deep discussions on what we are actually proposing and what it actually means. Because I think, for instance, if we made a proposal – perhaps even a joint one – on the transponder issue, we should also have immediate answers to questions such as: what is the forum where this issue should be discussed and what is the legal framework? Is it an issue of purely civilian security? I personally believe we should treat it as one. If we bring it entirely into the military realm, it will lead to a kind of Cold War-type debate of pros and cons, which I think is not helpful. This is a real issue and I am not underestimating it. There is a real possibility of a civilian aviation catastrophe happening – I mean, such a possibility is on the table. But how we should play it is another question, where I think caution is of great importance. Now, one of the big security issues that we are already facing is, if we put it simply, the Baltic States stuck in the Russian energy grid or the Russian energy ring if you please. It is a very complicated security issue, and we have already seen Russian boats harassing the ships laying out the NordBalt cable near Lithuania. And there are other moves in that direction. Russia is clearly not interested in us leaving the circle, and we are facing a number of political and technical problems. But I think in the end, regardless of how complicated and possibly costly it is, we should do it, because it's another sign and another real sort of move towards security, independence and switching to the European approach in energy policy. Thank you!

Auers:

Thank you! And Mr Sasi.

Sasi:

Thank you, Mister Chairman. The future is more difficult to predict than talking about something that should have been done in the past. As I said before, there are two challenges – security and economy. Security – because of the new Russian power policies and, unfortunately, because of the potential isolationism of Britain and the United States, which will be very harmful. As far as economy is concerned,

we see that Europe is not very willing to take new technologies into use – we rather try to protect old interests, which is not good for the economic growth.

Regarding the euro, I think there is one problem – Greece. If we had let Greece go four years ago, things would have been much better now. Because if you don't follow the rules, why should you be at the voting table? But there is a long tradition in Europe that you don't take any steps backwards so... As I said, I think

in this security situation we in the Nordic countries and in the Baltic States have to show that we are in the same family. It means that we should give more visibility to the Baltic-Nordic cooperation.

Ok, it has been proposed that ministerial meetings should always end with a declaration, but declarations are not enough – there must be substance. We should try making decisions on – and if not decisions then at least try dealing with – for example, infrastructure questions in the European Union and things that interest the press and the public. And even if you don't agree – disagreement is news as well! The main thing is that something is being told

about the cooperation so that people know that we are sitting at the same table. I think that is very important. Another important thing... Now there are six of us who are members of the European Union, out of the 28 (maybe 27) members, and we do have influence. I think we should coordinate our activities in the European Union better – we should more often have joint electronic ministerial meetings before the Council of Ministers’ meetings in the EU in order to coordinate what should be proposed and what should be said at those EU meetings. And also I think, in order to demonstrate the cooperation, we should have joint committee meetings among the national parliaments, especially I would say among the EU affairs’ committees, between the Nordic countries and the Baltic States. What has been done recently is setting up meetings among the European Parliament members, which I think is the most important forum where you should indeed have meetings quite often in order to convey messages from all the countries. If we can agree there, it can play a role. Then, implementation of the directives of the European Union... We in the Nordic Council are currently discussing that it would be very helpful if we implemented the directives in the same way. Because if we don’t do it, the free movement of people, trade, goods and so on between our countries can be hindered. Ok, if we can make it work among the Nordic states – great, but if we could broaden that cooperation into the Baltic States too... Of course, it is more difficult with eight countries but I think we should at least give it a try. Then, economic legislation...

If we want to have a common Baltic economic area, we should have as harmonized economic legislation as possible.

We should look into if we could do something in this respect. That’s a very difficult task, and if we could do something there within the Nordic cooperation in the Nordic Council it could be a good start, but taking the Baltic countries on board could be quite useful. And my final point... I remember that at the beginning of the 1990s there was a very good cooperation between the political parties in the Baltic States and the Nordic countries. People came from the Baltic States to my party’s institute, for example – they were trained, they learned what democracy meant and followed the party’s work. Today the cooperation is not working very well, and if I look at the party structure in the Baltic States I think there should be more stability and maybe more coherence with the party fractions we have at the European Parliament. However, I think

it is very important that we have common meetings, within the party lines, between the parties in the Nordic countries and the Baltic States.

You can always get good ideas from other parties about what could or should be done, and I think that could even develop party policies in our own countries and serve as a good step forward in establishing good party structures. Thank you so much!

Auers:

Ok, thank you, Mr Sasi, for these very concrete initiatives you put forward.

Mr Tetzschner?

Tetzschner:

Thank you! Self-complacency is not a helpful attitude at this point. We have a tendency to use a lot of speaking time assuring ourselves that we have the best countries in the world. In many ways we do have them but for the time being we also must be able to face our major strategic challenges: a revanchist Russia, an eroding stability in the greater Middle East causing waves of migration, a weakened EU, and recently – an uncertain American leadership. I would underline that what NATO urgently needs is a determined political leadership in order to restore its power and purpose. The NATO nations have slowly begun to respond to these challenges, reversing the harmful cutbacks in defense spending during the past years, but in spite of all this progress there is still more to do. During the NATO summit in July it was decided that a greater portion of capability would be shifted to the Baltic States, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and also to the Arctic.

NATO leaders should reaffirm NATO’s fundamental purpose – to advance and defend Europe whole, free and peaceful at a time of renewed danger.

NATO allies must continue to hold the line against the Russian aggression until a new generation of Russian leaders agrees to comply with the international law. We must also commit to greater military spending among the NATO allies. We must take more extensive steps to strengthen the collective defense against a full range of cyber threats and also to be prepared to adjust our defense against hybrid warfare.

We all must acknowledge the link between economics and security. Restoring economic growth and prosperity is a strategic imperative for the democratic states to sustain their institutions and retain the support of their electorates.

In all the NATO countries we must recommit to strengthening our collective democratic foundations and the rule of law. This also applies to the leaders of Hungary, Poland and Turkey – they must demonstrate their commitment to ensuring full freedoms and civil liberties of their citizens. Brexit has set the EU in movement so the future is uncertain. The remedy is to increase and intensify the Nordic-Baltic cooperation, where it is important to make it easier for private businesses and investment. Let me also add that the most urgent task is to ease energy dependency, where my country in particular could play an important role. Thank you!



Auers:

Ok, thank you! Well, we've now heard some very differing opinions on what the issues are and how we should deal with these challenges. So perhaps at this point I might ask the Minister to make a few comments about what he's heard and how he sees the future?

Rinkēvičs:

Well, first of all I discovered that there is a big difference between the former foreign ministers and the current ones. The former ones can always speak their mind – whenever I do that myself, I immediately get into trouble. That's unfortunate... But just a couple of quick points. Maybe to some extent, like it or not, we are coming to one issue that Carl mentioned in his introductory statement – that the Baltic States are currently more integrated in the West than the Nordic countries.

In an ideal world I would say that I will use the next twenty-five years to get an NB8 into both the European Union and NATO, even though for some of the countries it is very difficult.

I do think that at some point in time, if we continue to observe the security challenges we are currently seeing in the region – I think that this issue, which we didn't touch upon but which the Baltic politicians always like to speak about whenever they visit any of the Nordic countries, reminding about the NATO membership to Finland and Sweden and to some extent also having fun with the Icelandic and Norwegian colleagues when it comes to the European Union membership... I think that at some point in time this is going to be an issue that will be discussed. Of course, it's up to the societies and the governments in each separate country but still, I think that if we come to a situation which is not going to change for the better any time soon anyway, we will probably have to discuss this as well. I think we can really say that there has been a fairly good level of cooperation so far. You mentioned the meetings among the national parliament chairs of the European affair committees – actually they are happening all the time. The chairs of the foreign affairs committee are constantly meeting and coordinating; when it comes to the NB6 in the European Union, foreign ministers are having regular breakfasts right before the foreign affairs councils or the European Council meetings; prime ministers are having the same kind of coordination... So this is not where the actual issue is. I think that what we need is probably more coordination on the issues that we are interested in – the Eastern Partnership being one of the great policies that we have together been working on. I think that the Arctic neighbourhood is also something that we could work on, even if we are not part of that immediate region. I think that Brexit also poses a big question about the future we had envisaged jointly with the United

Kingdom in the Northern Future Forum, where the Nordic-Baltic and UK prime ministers and business communities had been gathering. But then there are also some challenges that we face and where we are trying to cooperate and provide a shared response. For instance,

three years ago nobody would talk about strategic communication as part of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation whereas now we are including it in our routine cooperation in order to tackle the effects of Russian propaganda, especially after 2014.

We are still working to address the issues concerning energy and the challenges we have there which have been mentioned. But also we still have some transportation networks to be developed – basically we are talking about the Rail Baltica project, which will link Helsinki via Baltics to Europe. But then there is of course a greater challenge which needs to be addressed and which Carl and some of the other colleagues have already been outlining – yes, after the great financial and economic crisis of 2008 we still have an issue with convergence with the Nordic countries. We in the Baltics still have a lot of issues to tackle, such as corruption, economy, demographic issues, which affect our own resilience to various challenges – that's where I think the Nordic-Baltic cooperation can be more dynamic, as in the 1990s which some of you were referring to. At the same time, there are so many good things which we simply have to continue. And my final point is... I think a couple of years ago we were talking with our Nordic friends about the need to retain the Nordic information offices in the Baltic States. There was a view that the job had been done and that the offices could be closed down. Thankfully, common sense prevailed and we still have those valuable instruments. But I also think that

we in the Baltics should think about increasing our own presence in the Nordic countries as well – through cultural, educational vehicles.

These things should, of course, be first clarified with our own ministers of finance but still I think they deserve to be mentioned.



Auers:

Ok, thank you! At this point I'd like to open up for a broader discussion.

Mørch:

Thank you so much! My name is Michael Metz Mørch. I was actually the second Danish ambassador to Latvia and opened, together with Rikke Helms, the Danish Cultural Institute, of which today I am the Director General. Very happy to be here! I know we have very little time so I think I'll just make one major point, which the wonderful strong Danish women in this group already touched upon – the basic power of 'soft power'. We tend, when we move in political circles, to talk about the structures of hard power. They are extremely important, but please do not forget that all these structures that we are all committed to and which we will develop as far as we can are based on *emotional* commitments from people, who need to be able to commit their life, blood and soul to whatever those hard-power structures demand from them.

If we do not keep alive the 'soft power' contacts among the real people – the real life and blood of international human relationships – then we lose the foundations that we need for the hard power.

And I am a little bit worried that if we do focus too much on the hard power we tend maybe to forget the cultural relationships and the human relationships that have to be nurtured, that have to be developed continuously. Before we started to get 'very bad people' from the Middle East we had years in Danish internal political debate when we had 'very bad people' from our new neighbours. It created a sickening atmosphere that simply did not promote mutual understanding across the Baltic Sea. We need to be very careful and try very hard to reestablish those powerful umbilical cords that connected us at the beginning of the process twenty-five years ago and think constructively of reinventing the mechanisms which can re-ignite the popular excitement, commitment and mutual love that we shared twenty-five years ago. Maybe we should do it in many different ways but I think we need to help each other to come up with constructive ideas on that dimension. We need culture, we need the Nordic Council of Ministers, we need the Latvian Institute, the Danish Cultural Institute and all the other Nordic and Baltic institutes to develop those human networks. Thank you!



Nyberg:

My name is René Nyberg and I am a former Finnish ambassador to Moscow and Berlin. I spent a great time in the 1990s working with the Baltic countries and I know Latvia quite well from that time. I wanted to say a word about Russia and I wanted to say a word about Germany. I do agree with Carl Bildt that Russia has accepted the existence and the independence of the Baltic countries and the fact that the Baltics are what they are and that they are lost for Russia. This is an enormous achievement, and it is actually an achievement of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. I am sure that the Warsaw decisions of NATO have stabilized the situation, which is of enormous importance for Finland and Sweden too. There is a new element to Russia which I noted the other week – I realized that there are people in Moscow, NGO people, who are desperate and are moving out. And not one but several of them are establishing themselves in Riga. I am thinking of one very respectable lady who told me her story – she is selling her apartment in Moscow and is about to move here. This is a very interesting new element, which is also quite complicated. Then a word about Germany... There is a wonderful bon mot from Helmut Kohl from some time in the late 1990s, when he at the very end of his chancellorship visited Riga, looked around and said: “Das ist ja wie Lübeck ohne Parkhäuser!”² (“This is like the city of Luebeck but without the parking houses.”) This was Germany then, but we have a totally different situation now, if we think about the Bundeswehr committed to the NATO presence in the Baltic States.

There will never be a stable situation in this part of the world as long as Germany is not fully committed.

We all remember from the 1990s, and even later in the 2000s, that it was very difficult to interest Bonn and Berlin in the issues concerning the Baltic Sea cooperation. It was actually something that was referred to the ‘Länder’ bordering on the Baltic Sea but it was never a federal issue in the way it is more or less now the case. This is something which I think we should pay a lot of attention to – that Germany will be committed and engaged in our region. Thank you!



Ražuks:

I am Romualds Ražuks, member of the Latvian Parliament and former chairman of the Latvian Popular Front in 1990-91. I have been listening to what Carl Bildt and Uffe Ellemann-Jensen are saying for twenty-five years – thank you, it has been quite useful! But what bothers me today? I remember the last session of the Nordic Council in Reykjavik, in the framework of which all eight prime ministers of our countries met. It was full of unanimous views, without almost no political contradictions or differences.

I think

the main difference between the Nordic countries and Baltic countries now, which also endangers our security, is differences in social guarantees.

Now, twenty-five years after the restoration of our independence, we are still at a point where the Nordic countries were maybe in the 1950s, if not earlier. And I think now it is an essential question – how to overcome these differences in a possibly shorter period of time? Because our people do not want to hear about the Maastricht criteria and all this stuff anymore – they really want some real changes. It is understandable that, unlike our recovery from the First World War when everything was in place in ten-fifteen years, after the Communism it has been very different and very difficult. But we have lots of Nordic businesses here, we have the Foreign Investors’ Council – maybe it is still possible through our parliamentary or governmental cooperation, through all these institutions to find and suggest additional mechanisms of how to sooner overcome these differences in social guarantees, in the access to healthcare. Because now it’s a really number one question for our societies, and I think that is the reason why populists can reach our own political landscape too, sooner or later, and get us into a big trouble.

Neretnieks:

Thank you! And thank you very much for inviting me. My name is Kārlis Neretnieks and I have been engaged a little bit in the military cooperation between Sweden and the Baltic States. I have made an observation during this discussion that things have really changed.

Today you can really ask – who are the security providers in the Baltic Sea area? Earlier it was obvious – Sweden, Denmark, Finland. But today, to my mind, that has changed quite drastically.

I would even say that today it's payback time for the Baltic States. Now it's your turn to help us – the Swedes and, to some extent, the Finns – to integrate into the security structures that have evolved here in the Baltic Sea area. So one area of cooperation in the future – or let's call it a wish from my side – is that you take the lead in integrating Sweden and to some extent Finland more into the structures you are building. Thank you!

Cakule:

Thank you... Elita Cakule, Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities. I would like to touch upon a well-known concept – the Nordic welfare model, whose main cornerstone is the social dialogue, the dialogue between the employees and employers. One of the achievements of these twenty-five years is actually the freedom of choice – where to study, where to work and where to live. We see that young, well-educated people choose working places with the administrative culture where they are heard, where they are seen and where they can participate in the decision-making. So my question would be –

how could the Nordic-Baltic cooperation be used to develop the Nordic welfare model into a Nordic-Baltic welfare model?

Thank you!



Auers:

And there was another comment..?

Bertelman:

Thank you! I was a consul general in Leningrad in 1988, and was accredited to the Popular Front here in Riga – that's how it began. It's not easy to add anything to all the things that have been said but...

I think the question looming here is – will the tougher times lying ahead bring us closer together?

In 1991-94 I think you did everything right in a very short window of time. There was a great concentration of mind, which helped to do the right thing. Now there are more clouds on the horizon, but as Uffe Ellemann-Jensen said we have the power to be very influential. Jūri Luik pointed out the interests that we have while Foreign Minister Rinkēvičs pointed out the mechanisms we have. But do we have the concentration of mind? In some sense we are eight peripheries, and we are absorbed by larger questions and torn in various directions. I think there is a need for a conscious effort in order to realize that we can make a difference but that it will require more from the current politicians. We cannot just complain about the leaders of the big countries on the continent – we have work to do at home too. Thank you!



Auers:

Thank you. Unfortunately, we are coming to the end of our time. We have a film screening at 15:20 so if we want to squeeze in a coffee break we'll have to wrap it up now. However, I hope that we can continue some of the discussions that we've started. We seem to be on the same side – we all agree that there have been tremendous advancements in Nordic-Baltic cooperation over the last twenty-five years but that there are challenges to come. I hope that when we meet in twenty-five years' time – and I hope that the minister is planning that – for a fifty-years' event, we will be looking back on yet another twenty-five years of successful cooperation. I'll now give the floor to minister Rinkēvičs for some brief concluding remarks.

Rinkēvičs:

Thank you very much to all of you for being here! As I said in my introduction, we have here a remarkable set of good friends with whom we have developed very personal relationships over these twenty-five years. I don't think we need to wait for another twenty-five years – we can always come back in a year or in five years and look back into the past but also into the future. Thank you very much to everyone, and thanks to the Nordic Council of Ministers for co-hosting this event and also for being a very good partner to the Foreign Ministry. But the coffee is waiting and the film is waiting, and the challenges too...









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1991-2016 AND THE WAY AHEAD

In 2016, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the restoration of independence of the three Baltic States and the re-establishment of regular, multifaceted Baltic-Nordic cooperation ties.

A quarter of a century is an important milestone calling for reflection and evaluation:

How far has the cooperation advanced? What is its track record? What achievements has it yielded? And, perhaps most pertinent of all, where do we want to go from here and how do we envisage our next twenty-five years together?