

Dear colleagues,

I would like to welcome all of you to the Annual Meeting of the Heads of Lithuanian Diplomatic Missions.

This is the fourth and final meeting of this kind during the current Government's term of office. This term has been full of crises and challenges, during which the diplomatic service has consistently been at the forefront of defending Lithuania's interests.

I extend my gratitude to you and all my colleagues working in missions or in Vilnius. What we have achieved in defending Lithuania's interests is the result of our collective focus and joint efforts.

Due to our geographical position and strong instincts sharpened by our history, we don't accept dictates, which is why we are often the first to withstand waves of pressure from our adversaries. Although painful, these experiences develop our ability to quickly grasp situations and prepare in time for new fronts in an increasingly volatile geopolitical storm.

For four years, we have operated under rising tensions, fostered by autocracies that are increasingly emboldened to challenge the rules-based order. We have faced flows of illegal migrants escorted by Lukashenko, coped with unprecedented economic and diplomatic pressure from China, and concentrated all our attention and efforts on the Kremlin's full-scale aggression in Ukraine, focusing on the fundamental issues of the survival of Europe's and Lithuania's freedom.

We can be proud that we have not wavered and have once again proved that *a foreign policy based on values is the most pragmatic choice Lithuania can make*. We have mobilised the region and Europe to protect our borders, impressively expanded the horizon of economic partnerships, and found the strength and perseverance to enhance Lithuania's security.

The timely detection of threats, mobilisation of responses, and making of decisions have become a routine part of the Diplomatic Service's work. How to convince Baghdad and Ankara that the instrumentalised migration flights to Minsk must stop? How to cooperate with other border states to enforce border control and fight sanctions evasion? How to persuade Germany to deploy its brigade in Lithuania on a permanent basis? How to oust Russia from the board of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons for the first time in history? How to prevent the transport of fertilisers by Belaruskali, which funds the Lukashenko regime and abducts Ukrainian children, through Lithuania? How to achieve a more ambitious, unified voice from the Nordic-Baltic countries, a Lithuania's values-based inner circle?

Answering these questions required not only new methods of operation but also countless hours of your patient work. Together, we are a strong force, and we must remain so. That is why today I invite you to discuss the most significant achievements of the Lithuanian diplomatic service and the most important priorities and challenges for the future.

Today, we operate in an unstable international environment. We are monitoring developments in the societies and governments of our most important allies with concern. We see that decision-making processes in the organisations most important to us are showing cracks. Despite Russian sabotage, subversions, and kinetic attacks against NATO countries and an increasingly clear picture of threats to NATO territory, Western capitals still lack a focused strategy to contain and defeat Russia.

Therefore, we have no choice but to continue to make **Lithuania's national security** interests an absolute foreign policy priority. I believe they are very clear:

- To have a combat-ready German Army Brigade in Lithuania, integrated into the NATO defence architecture and properly equipped.
- To have US troops deployed in Lithuania alongside German forces and ensure Lithuania's visibility on US strategic radars.
- To ensure Lithuania is under an effective air defence umbrella and NATO regional defence plans are fully implemented together with allies.
- To have a clear plan and determination to defend every inch of our land from the first minute, alongside Poland and the Nordic-Baltic countries.
- To effectively thwart hybrid threats and create strategic dilemmas for Russia.
- To ensure that Europe and the wider international community understand the dangers of the spread of authoritarianism and have a long-term strategy to contain Russia.

These fundamental pillars will determine the success of all our other activities.

Our country's security is inseparably linked to **Ukraine's victory over Russian aggression**. Should Ukraine fall or be forced to sign an imposed peace agreement, it would be a defeat for us all. The Kremlin would then immediately begin a countdown to a new attack, potentially targeting NATO's eastern flank, especially our region. I refrain from speculating on how much time we have, but we cannot rely on the strategic assumption that Russia will surrender, nor can we expect Ukraine to indefinitely fend off Russia without adequate Western military support. I do not rule out the possibility that the next two to four years will be the most dangerous. Not only because of how quickly Russia is rebuilding and building its capabilities but also because as Western defence efforts gain momentum, Russia may view this period as its last window of opportunity to dismantle our security architecture.

Ukraine's victory remains the most viable strategy to significantly reduce the Russian threat. Therefore, today we must act as a voice of conscience, preventing the strong from bullying the weak, urging the world community to stand with Ukraine and calling on our closest allies to take necessary actions, as this is also the guarantee of Lithuania's survival. At the same time, we must not forget that, in calling on others, we must also demonstrate our readiness to make a tangible contribution ourselves.

In the context of Russia's aggression and the authoritarian axis it forms, Lithuania's decision to resist Chinese pressure and expand the geography of its relations in the **Indo-Pacific region** appears self-evident, despite initial doubts two years ago. *Lithuania's decision has proven successful – short-term economic losses have been offset by regained freedom of decision-making and recognition from the strategic partners*, with Lithuanian exports to the region increasing by one-fifth over four years. Lithuanian embassies in Australia, South Korea and Singapore are now operating, and new regional representative offices are opening in Vilnius. Today, we are the only regional country engaged in strategic dialogue with the United States on Indo-Pacific. We are forging a strategic partnership with Japan. We have significantly accelerated the adoption of the EU's Anti-Coercion Instrument. Finally, we are building schools in Ukraine funded not only by our own resources but also by Taiwan.

Dear colleagues,

Time and again, we have demonstrated our ability to punch above our weight, shaping not only public narratives but also strategic actions. Let us make this our entire diplomatic service's *modus operandi*.

Let us dare to be inconvenient! We are only as small and insignificant as we consider ourselves to be. One can always argue that fighting for your own interests is frowned upon, unpleasant, and not in line with the current view of our partners. However, safeguarding Lithuania's strategic interests remains the mission of our diplomatic service. In today's circumstances, we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of drifting downstream. Especially during wartime, we must step out of our comfort zones in the interest of national security. *If we fail to do so, the comfort zone may soon simply*

disappear altogether.

Had we quietly agreed that “there is no need to escalate the conflict”, that we cannot send HIMARS, Leopards or Patriots to Ukraine, Russia might be even closer to our borders today. Had we not worked diligently, after the outbreak of war we might now be waiting those ten uncertain days for a German brigade to arrive

In the interests of Lithuania, let us not be afraid to admit that the conventional formats have not worked in wartime and must be transformed. Let us not hesitate to criticise international organisations if they continue to act as if there was no war on the European continent. We cannot turn a blind eye when, against the backdrop of a bombed-out children’s hospital in Kyiv, the Russian ambassador chairs a UN Security Council meeting and offers “Chicken Kiev” to the delegates of countries supporting Ukraine. How would we feel if our pleas for national survival were met with conformist silence? Let us ask ourselves if toothless and self-absorbed multilateralism is in our interest amidst such events?

We need to actively mobilise and form like-minded alliances to achieve our interests. In geopolitical and value terms, the priorities are crystal clear. *Ukraine, Poland, Estonia and Latvia* face the same threats, understand them and can react to them more rapidly.

The Nordic and Baltic countries, bound by geography and shared values, represent a common pool of interests. Especially following Finland and Sweden’s NATO accession, it is imperative to expand Lithuania’s security depth through common interests and positions. The political consolidation and physical reinforcement of NATO’s north-eastern flank is also vital in view of Russia’s plans to expand its military capabilities in this direction.

Germany and France are the nucleus of Europe. We have entered a new level of strategic partnership with them. We must seize this opportunity and sustain this momentum.

The US remains Lithuania’s paramount and indispensable security guarantor, therefore it is essential to ensure close ties across the US political spectrum. Despite the US election outcomes, the aim of our diplomats will be to prove that Lithuania plays a pivotal role in the transatlantic link to Europe and that Washington needs a secure Lithuania in this geostrategically important location. We also need to understand that partnerships need to be mutually beneficial, therefore as Washington shifts its focus toward the Indo-Pacific, we must seek niches for cooperation.

Dear colleagues,

This year marks a period of change. New governments are in place in London, The Hague, and Warsaw. We are literally holding our breath for developments in Paris, we are waiting for the outcome of the US elections. These changes in strategic capitals may necessitate new tactics, yet our strategic objectives remain the same. A secure Lithuania, a triumphant Ukraine, a strong NATO and an efficient EU remain our guiding principles across capitals.

Let us not allow the political operations of our diplomatic service to become gray, invisible and aimed to please everyone after the elections. Putin is not going to change: he will continue to bomb children’s hospitals, orchestrate hybrid attacks, plot to dismantle democracies and implement imperial ambitions. Lithuania will continue to need allied troops, Patriots, security guarantees, robust NATO defence plans grounded in real capabilities, a defence industry that is operating at full speed, and a united EU voice. Europe and our allies will continue to need a principled, assertive voice, albeit uncomfortable at times. You will be that voice, and I wish you the determination and audacity to move forward.