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„Berlin Foreign Policy Forum 2023“

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Excellencies,

It is my pleasure to stand before you today at this important event held at a critical juncture for Lithuania, Germany, and Europe.

Lithuania and Germany are bound by history.

When we trace the story of Lithuania over a thousand years back, we arrive at Quedlinburg.

Just two and a half hours drive outside Berlin, where we find the first written mentioning of Lithuanian state in the town's famous Annals.

So one can say that our bilateral relations date back a thousand years and more.

Our history is rich in sagas, names, treaties and events, but today I am not here to talk about that history.

Today I would like to talk about the present and the future. I will focus on three main issues:

- the significance of Ukraine for European security;
- the urgent need to invest in our own security;
- and the importance of German leadership.

The world is in a polycrisis. Russia's barbaric war in Ukraine, Hamas' attack against Israel and its people and the war in Gaza, tensions in both South Caucasus and Western Balkans; and on top of that the Indo-Pacific.

This is not just a perfect storm type of situation.

Crises emerge in different regions, for different reasons, and we are sparked by different actors. But we cannot say that they are not related.

They are all useful to those who benefit from chaos and dismantling of the conventional rules based international order.

And they all require additional attention from countries and alliances that have a deep interest in defending the rules-based order.

As the world continues to heat up, with the international system increasingly fragmented, many wonder whether we will be able to manage them all amidst the distractions on multiple fronts. How many wars can we effectively fight? Will we be forced to choose? And if so, which ones will we choose?

The outcome of these deliberations will directly affect Lithuania's interests, and perhaps even our survival, - as in a period of interconnected conflicts, **a display of weakness in one crisis triggers a chain reaction in another part of the world.**

I would argue that someday, when historians look back on these times, Russia's aggression and the West's reaction to it may be an inflection point. While it has not been the starting point, but it certainly has been a pivotal moment that will shape the course of global events for decades to come. Yet this is not a history yet — it is our present, which we will still have the opportunity and duty to shape.

We need to be brutally honest and aware that **Russia is at war with the West.**

Though geographically contained in Ukraine and fought by Ukrainians, **it is our war.**

If Ukraine loses, we all lose, with all the consequences that it entails. If Ukraine wins – let us try to imagine, for just one second, what kind of opportunities that will create from Belarus to South Caucasus, from Western Balkans to Africa.

To say that **Ukraine is defending its statehood, but also the borders of Poland, Baltic states, and thus security of Europe** – is not a figurative expression.

Unfortunately, almost two years into the war, we already start seeing signs of fatigue in some countries. New crises and conflicts are starting to push Ukraine off the list of political priorities.

Yet the **war fatigue is a phenomenon of societies living in peace; for Ukraine, giving in to fatigue would mean ceasing to exist.**

Which means that we cannot give in either. In the West, we certainly have the resources to ensure Ukraine's victory. The only thing lacking is the courage to acknowledge that this is not just Russia's war against Ukraine; rather, it is a battle against the Western world and democracy that Putin is waging alongside accomplices who seek global instability. To acknowledge, that as long Russia retains the initiative, it will continue escalating. Just because it can.

Russia had time to successfully recover from the initial shock when the blitzkrieg failed, switched to the mode of 24/7 war-time economy, and while with certain delays, is on track to achieve a major strengthening of its armed forces in the Western direction. Just across our borders.

Ukraine can effectively defend, fight, and win if we provide sufficient and timely support. More ammunition, more air defence, long range missiles for Ukraine and continuous flow of support is our responsibility.

Allowing Russia to freeze a conflict on Ukrainian territory, would open a constant source of tension and instability, and give Russia more time to prepare.

Ukraine's victory is of existential significance not only for Lithuania and Germany, but I would argue - for the whole democratic world.

And that is why also **Ukraine's integration into NATO and the EU must also be our overriding objective and highest priority.** If we want to deter future aggressions, there's no alternative to providing Ukraine the ultimate security guarantees – the membership in these organisations. The enlargement to the East was a success story. Let us try to think for a moment what would staying outside NATO and EU for the Baltic states and Poland with imperialist Russia emboldened. How different would Germany's security picture look like today?

The key lesson's from Lithuania's success story is that you cannot shape a positive change while remaining a passive observer or defining your strategy by things you cannot or would not do.

And just like 20 years ago, when the West took a courageous step, we can repeat that success story. We should seize this historic opportunity already this December by launching the accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova.

Strategic decisions are only possible if there is enough muscle behind them.

Since the start of Russia's invasion, Europe has consolidated military support for Ukraine both nationally and via the European Peace Facility, allowing the European collective military support to nearly match that of the US. **The geopolitical Union is finally emerging. At the very critical time, the EU is proving again its ability to adapt, deepen integration and rise to the challenge.**

Russia's barbaric war against Ukraine and the NATO's defence planning have also revealed the **dramatic lack of military capabilities in Europe.**

We need to produce more ammunition, more air defence systems, invest in cyber defence, military mobility and logistics, and support our defence industries.

The only way out is via increasing defence spending significantly and creating new mechanisms to strengthen our defence industries.

Spending 2 percent on defence is already old news. To catch up for years of underinvestment we need to spend more, and quickly. Unfortunately, if 2 percent is the floor, some of us are still in the basement.

During the Cold War, spending 3-4 percent on defence was not an issue. Today, the security situation is more volatile, the war is already raging and the risk of a direct military conflict in the time span of several years is there. Are we ready for that?

Our societies got used to the comfort of peaceful times and continuous economic growth. Public disengagement from defence matters is dangerously high. Yet for every society in danger the foundation of the Maslow's pyramid remains the same —security and defence interests. It is up to us politicians to explain to our societies that Europe is no longer at peace.

Today, **Germany's leadership in Europe is more important than ever.**

For Lithuania, Germany's decision to permanently deploy a heavy brigade in Lithuania is a genuine symbol of *Zeitenwende*. A fresh breath of good news in times of trouble. It will be by far the largest NATO presence on the Eastern Flank and will significantly strengthen deterrence and defence posture in our region. An example to follow by other Allies. We are extremely grateful to Germany for standing with us.

This will not only be a fundamental change increasing security, but also an opportunity to reach a new qualitative level of partnership with Germany. Germany is becoming the European strategic pillar of Lithuania's security.

We have all the right tools to protect our way of life now and in the future.

All we need is honest acknowledgement of risks associated to global reconfiguration taking place in front of our eyes, and a will to defend our way of life.

Thank you.