

Welcome speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis
„Lithuania-German Forum 2023“
Annual Conference
December 18, 2023, Vilnius

Dear Speaker,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to welcome all of you here, at this annual meeting of the Lithuanian-Germany forum.

It is a pleasure, because I am among close friends, and we can all be proud of what has been achieved since the Forum started 18 years ago. Economic cooperation between Lithuania and Germany is thriving, and mutual investments are beating the odds.

But it is also a challenge because, after years of working together in a peaceful environment, we are facing a new kind of reality – one of war and unpredictability. As much as our two countries would find it painful, we are now back to the days when a wall is once again rising in Europe. Luckily it will not be called the Berlin Wall this time, but the events we are witnessing in Ukraine may well determine, which city will have an unfortunate faith of lending this wall its new name.

Achievements of our cooperation are impressive. But in today's situation, years of joint efforts can evaporate in a moment if we do not respond properly to what is happening in our immediate neighbourhood. We cannot pretend that events in and about Ukraine take place on the other side of some imagined or virtual screen, which we could turn off, hit pause or lower the sound and naively hope nothing would affect us.

The emergence of the *Zeitenwende*, steps towards improved security and preparedness that followed, clearly show that there was indeed a policy change (an awakening) in Germany that made our threat assessments much more aligned.

Germany's decision to deploy over 5000 troops in Lithuania is a decision of geo-strategic, geo-political, and geo-economic importance for both countries. It is also a strong expression of geopolitical Europe, as Ursula von der Leyen put it. Finally, it is a clear signal that Europe can be united and is able to contribute to its own security.

Lithuania deeply appreciates Germany's choice to permanently station the brigade in this country. It is a strategic element of NATO deterrence by denial, which is the only deterrence the Russian regime understands.

Preparations to ensure the best possible host nation conditions are already underway and is a top priority for this (our) government. Today's signature (later today) of the implementation roadmap by our Ministries of Defence sets the preparations on the good track so that the brigade can fully settle here in just a few short years.

While the brigade is above all an investment into our collective NATO security, there is no doubt it will also become a catalyst that brings our societies much closer.

And that is precisely where this Forum can unleash its full potential. More Germans will discover Lithuania and come back to do business here. More Lithuanians will discover interest to expand their German vocabulary beyond the word *Zeitenwende*. Our children will be growing up together and chart their future as fellow Europeans.

The task of this forum will be to inspire, promote and foster this common future. To embrace the goal of more Germany in Lithuania and more Lithuania in Germany.

So thank you all for dedicating your time to think and discuss our common path.

Ich wünsche uns allen noch mehr Litauen in Deutschland und noch mehr Deutschland in Litauen! (*Aš linkiu mums visiems dar daugiau Lietuvos Vokietijoje ir dar daugiau Vokietijos Lietuvoje*)

Ačiū! Danke schoen!