



NHSMUN

Background Guide | *CRISIS: BALTIC SEA*

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Amaya Lage and I am so excited to welcome you to the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) crisis! My co-director, Anna, and I have done extensive research for months on the topic and are very excited to now pass on that information to you as a starting block!

The CBSS has a very rich and nuanced history but now faces its next battle. In the past few years, tensions have been rising within the region. In this simulation it is up to you to decide how to best address the situations at hand and find a way to ease the tensions and create long-term solutions.

I am currently a junior at the University at Buffalo studying neuroscience with a pre-vet track. My dream job is to work in animal conservation. Fun fact, I actually switched my major two times. I was accepted as a history major. However, in sophomore year I switched to biology, then three months later to neuroscience. In my spare time, I love playing games with friends, shopping, and exploring new areas (and shopping).

This year is my seventh year doing MUN! I started as a freshman in high school, and my passion continued into college. I was the assistant director of the African Union Crisis for Session I. It was truly such an enjoyable experience. I loved seeing the delegates' reactions to the sudden crises and coming up with creative solutions. I am incredibly excited to come back!

If you have any questions about the topic or need clarification on anything, please do not hesitate to reach out! Anna and I are always happy to help and respond.

Best wishes,

Amaya-Nan Lage

Crisis: Council of the Baltic Sea States

Session I

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Anna Barrett and I will be your Council of the Baltic Sea States director for Session II! Amaya and I are thrilled to present you with this background guide that we hope will serve as a starting point as you explore all that this committee has to offer. Crisis committees offer a unique forum for you as delegates to showcase creative problem-solving skills, and I encourage you as delegates to bring your own personalities to your roles in committee! As you research, consider not only the present state of the issues presented in this guide, but their histories and broader contexts as well. Ask questions, dive deeper, and remember that these issues are complex. You are tasked with weighing all of these considerations as you look to the future of the Baltic Sea region and work to establish peace.

To introduce myself, I am a sophomore at the George Washington University studying international affairs and political science. In my spare time I love knitting, experimenting in the kitchen, and exploring all that DC has to offer (although home will always be New Jersey)!

MUN has held an extra special place in my life throughout high school and college, and I attended NHSMUN as a delegate my junior year of high school before returning to serve as an Assistant Director for UN-Habitat last year. Outside NHSMUN, I am proud to represent GWU as a delegate on the college MUN circuit, specializing in crisis committees, of course. NHSMUN is a truly special experience, and I encourage you to get as much out of it as you can. Learn, connect with your fellow delegates, and enjoy your time in committee!

I will see you all in committee!

Anna Barrett

Crisis: Council of the Baltic Sea States

Session II

nhsmun.crisiscbss@imuna.org



A NOTE ON RESEARCH AND PREPARATION

Delegate research and preparation is a critical element of attending NHSMUN and enjoying the debate experience. We have provided this Background Guide to introduce the topics that will be discussed in your committee. We encourage and expect each of you to critically explore the selected topics and be able to identify and analyze their intricacies upon arrival to the conference.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging, but to assist delegates, we have updated our [Beginner Delegate Guide](#), [Advanced Delegate Guide](#), [Research Guide](#), and [Rules of Procedure Guide](#). In particular, these guides contain more detailed instructions on how to prepare a position paper and excellent sources that delegates can use for research. Use these resources to your advantage. They can help transform a sometimes overwhelming task into what it should be: an engaging, interesting, and rewarding experience.

To accurately represent a role, delegates must be able to articulate its policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. In delegations with two students, we strongly encourage each student to research each topic to ensure that they are both prepared to debate throughout the committee. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the Research Guide. To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections.

I: Topic Background – This section should describe the history of the topic as it would be described by the delegate's role. Delegates do not need to give an exhaustive account of the topic. It is best to focus on the details that are most important to the delegation's policy and proposed solutions.

II: Character Policy – This section should discuss the character's policy regarding the topic. Each paper should state the policy in plain terms and include the relevant statements, statistics, and research that support the effectiveness of the policy. Comparisons with other global issues are also appropriate.

III. Proposed Solutions – This section should detail the delegation's proposed solutions to address the topic. Descriptions of each solution should be thorough. Each idea should clearly connect to the specific problem it aims to solve and identify potential obstacles to implementation and how they can be avoided. The solution should be a natural extension of the character's policy.

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages** long double-spaced with standard margins and 12 point font size. This is a maximum; **3–5 pages per topic is often a suitable length**. The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned role and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for submitting position papers on or before **February 20, 2026**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, a position must be submitted on or before **January 30, 2026**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the dais of each committee and returned prior to your arrival at the conference. Instructions on how to submit position papers will be shared directly with faculty advisors.

Complete instructions for how to submit position papers will be sent to faculty advisers via email. If delegations are unable to submit their position papers on time, please contact us at nhsmun@imuna.org.

Delegations that do not submit position papers will be ineligible for awards.

COMMITTEE HISTORY

The Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is a regional intergovernmental organization and deliberative forum. It was founded in 1992 by Germany and Denmark, with the support of other Baltic coastal states. It was intended to strengthen regional cooperation and security in the Baltic Sea region following the breakup of the Soviet Union.¹ The collapse of the Soviet Union opened the door for newly independent states like Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to pursue democratic reforms.² Alongside the founding members, the European Union played a major role in helping to found the Council. A system of observer states was also created to involve nearby but non-Baltic powers. These currently include France, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine, the United States, and others.³

The CBSS aims to develop peace, stability, and prosperity across the Baltic Sea Region by serving as a platform for cooperation among members.⁴ It advances three long-term goals: “Regional Identity,” “Safe and Secure Region,” and “Sustainable and Prosperous Region,” which guide its work on culture, civil protection, and sustainable development.⁵ The Council works through a Permanent Secretariat in Stockholm and a rotating annual presidency that allows members to set thematic priorities. Several experts and working groups (on issues like civil protection, sustainable development, children’s rights, and human trafficking) carry out the agenda. Through its sustainability arm, Baltic 21, updated as Baltic 2030, the CBSS supports regional implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁶ CBSS resolutions are non-binding and instead promote coordination and regional alignment with EU policies, UN SDGs, and other frameworks. Since 2012, its Project Support Facility, a grant program run by the CBSS, has funded over 60 projects, including environmental and cultural initiatives, with current funding around 3,000,000 euros.⁷

Today, all CBSS member countries are also members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and all but Norway and Iceland are also members of the EU. CBSS members have broadly supported observer state Ukraine’s path to EU membership and closer NATO ties, with differing views on timing. Since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the CBSS has condemned Russia’s actions and called for sanctions and other restrictions. It also suspended Russia from the Council. Even though Russia was a founding member, it then withdrew in 2022, marking the sharpest break in CBSS history.⁸ The Council has also endorsed efforts to diversify energy sources and reduce dependence on Russian supplies, including the European Commission’s REPowerEU plan. REPowerEU aims to reduce and phase out reliance on Russian fossil fuels. Coal is already banned, oil and some petroleum products are capped, gas has been curtailed but not banned EU-wide, and nuclear fuel is not subject to a blanket EU ban.⁹ Alongside security and energy, the CBSS continues to prioritize sustainable maritime development, youth and cultural exchanges, and regional identity initiatives.

1 CBSS. 2024. “About Us – CBSS.” CBSS. 2024. cbss.org/about-us/; “CBSS – Background and Vision for Future Cooperation in BSR | Baltic Rim Economies.” 2019. [sites.utu.fi](https://sites.utu.fi/2019/). 2019.

2 Republic of Estonia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Council of the Baltic Sea States.” 2020, vm.ee/en/international-relations/regional-cooperation/council-baltic-sea-states.

3 CBSS. 2025. “Sustainable Development – CBSS.” CBSS. 2025. cbss.org/sustainable-development/.

4 CBSS. “Sustainable Development – CBSS.”

5 Council of the Baltic Sea States “Joint Statement of the Council of the Baltic Sea States Foreign Ministers.” May 16, 2025, [www.vm.ee/en/news/joint-statement-council-baltic-sea-states-foreign-ministers](https://valisministeerium.ee/en/news/joint-statement-council-baltic-sea-states-foreign-ministers).

6 Massrali, Nabila, and Peter Stano. 2022. “Russia/Belarus: Members suspend Russia and Belarus from Council of the Baltic Sea States.” March 5, 2022, EEAS

7 Council of the Baltic Sea States “Joint Statement of the Council of the Baltic Sea States Foreign Ministers.”

8 Council of the Baltic Sea States “Joint Statement of the Council of the Baltic Sea States Foreign Ministers.”

9 European Commission, “REPowerEU: Affordable, Secure and Sustainable Energy for Europe,” accessed August 23, 2025, https://commission.europa.eu/topics/energy/repowerEU_en



Securing the Frontier

Photo Credit: Dietmar Rabich

For centuries, the Baltic states have held a strategic geopolitical position. Historically, they were best known for trade. Their location made them a crucial link between the East and West. In modern times, however, the region is seen as one of the most critical zones for security and defense between Western allies and Russia. The Baltic states remain wary of Russian aggression. Since the start of the Russian-Ukraine war, they have shown strong support for Ukraine. Today, they stand as the first line of defense if Russia tries further territorial expansion.

NATO and the Baltic states have expanded their military presence in response to rising tensions.

NATO launched the “Baltic Sentry” mission to bring in new naval, air, and ground forces. By March 2025, the region also had many troops from NATO allies, including from the US, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada.¹ These forces strengthen deterrence and support Baltic defense, though much of this presence remains rotational rather than permanent.

NATO allies and the Baltic region face risks beyond conventional war. Digital systems and energy supplies are common targets of so-called hybrid attacks, which include cyber intrusions, sabotage, and disinformation campaigns.² Recent damage to undersea cables and pipelines has shown how

fragile critical infrastructure can be.³ Estonia’s 2007 cyberattack also remains a landmark example, demonstrating how states can be destabilized through digital networks. These experiences have driven the Baltic states to advocate for stronger EU and CBSS coordination on cyber and energy security.⁴

The Baltic states fear that Russia could one day attempt to expand beyond their borders. Such an act would violate international agreements and ignore basic rules of sovereignty. A balance between credible military strength and long-term cooperation is therefore essential for the stability of Europe and the security of its citizens.

TOPIC BACKGROUND

Baltic State Reliance on NATO

After World War I, the Baltic states declared independence from the Russian Empire. That freedom lasted only 20 years. In 1940, the Soviet Union took control and made them part of the USSR. Soon after, mass deportations began. Between June 1940 and

June 1941, at least 600,000 Baltic people were executed, conscripted, or deported to Siberia and other remote areas. The Soviets wanted to remove anti-Soviet groups and tighten their hold on the region. Instead, these actions strengthened Baltic identity and fueled the demand for independence.⁵ Through movements for the next 51 years, the people of the Baltic

States fought for their freedom.⁶ In the 1980s, the Soviet Union began to struggle to keep control. The KGB attempted to suppress any signs of opposition; however, this only gave the Baltic people more determination. Rallies and demonstrations began to break out all throughout the region. The people began to openly oppose and challenge the powers. While

1 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “Baltic Countries Feel Aftershocks from U.S. Suspension of Ukraine Military Aid,” RFERL, March 6, 2025, accessed August 11, 2025, www.rferl.org/a/trump-zelenskyy-putin-ukraine-war-baltics-military-aid/33337368.html.

2 Seth G. Jones, “Russia’s Shadow War Against the West,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 18, 2025, accessed August 11, 2025, www.csis.org/analysis/russias-shadow-war-against-west.

3 Clean Energy Wire, “Gas Pipeline Nord Stream 2 Links Germany to Russia, but Splits Europe,” Clean Energy Wire, May 19, 2025, accessed August 11, 2025, www.cleanenergywire.org/factsheets/gas-pipeline-nord-stream-2-links-germany-russia-splits-europe.

4 Council on Foreign Relations, “Estonian Denial of Service Incident,” *Cyber Operations Tracker*, May 2007, accessed August 10, 2025, www.cfr.org/cyber-operations/estonian-denial-service-incident.

5 Gabriel Torrance, “Soviet Occupation in the Baltics,” *The Sixth Form Review*, October 6, 2023, thesixthformreview.wordpress.com/soviet-occupation-in-the-baltics/.

6 Peter Rutland, “Introduction: Nation-Building in the Baltic States: Thirty Years of Independence,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 52, no. 3 (July 3, 2021): 419–24, doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2021.1944551.

the majority of these protests were non-violent, a few of them were met with Soviet forces, causing the bloodshed.⁷

One of the most famous protests was called the “Baltic Way” or “Baltic Chain.” It was a coordinated human chain that stretched 675 kilometers. Around two million people joined hands across all three Baltic capitals: Riga, Vilnius, and Tallinn. The Baltic States specifically refers to the three countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, but the Baltic Sea States is a wider geographical term for countries with a coastline on the Baltic Sea. The protest was organized by popular front movements in each state: Rahvarinne in Estonia, Tautas fronte in Latvia, and Sąjūdis in Lithuania. It took place on August 23, 1989. The date marked the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which was a secret deal between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. It had divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. Germany would control the west, while the Soviets would take the east. The agreement designated the Baltic states as part of the USSR.⁸

The Baltic Way became one of the most significant protests in the region. It placed heavy pressure on Soviet leaders and fueled the drive for independence. Less than a year later, in March 1990, Lithuania declared independence. Latvia and Estonia soon followed.⁹ In August of 1991, determined to keep control of the Soviet Union, communists planned to capture the then-president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev. However, they had very little support both politically and militarily, and the coup collapsed in days. This failed attempt led to the downfall of Gorbachev’s political career, and by December of that same year, the Soviet Union collapsed.¹⁰ Despite the official collapse in December, the Baltic States’ independence was widely recognized by September of that year.

After regaining independence, the Baltic states faced major security problems. Their economies had been part of the Soviet system and needed to be rebuilt. They also had to decide how to handle large Russian minority groups who now lived in a foreign territory. The states had few resources and could

not build strong militaries right away. Even with challenges, the Baltic states acted quickly.¹¹

In 1992, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania became founding members of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. Soon after, they also joined the Council of Europe. These steps helped the Baltic states build stronger legal systems and align with international norms.¹² Their push for integration continued. In 2004, all three became members of NATO in the largest round of NATO expansion.¹³ Before joining NATO, the Baltic states also built joint defense projects. They set up the Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT). They also formed the Baltic Naval Squadron (BALTRON). Another step was the Baltic Air Surveillance Network (BALTNET). Finally, they created the Baltic Defense College (BALTDEFCOL).¹⁴

NATO is an international alliance formed in 1949. It was created as a security measure against Soviet troops in eastern and central Europe after the Second World War. Today, NATO has 32 member states. Its main purpose is to safeguard the security of all members. This means that if one member is attacked,

7 “The Baltic States 1918–2018,” The Baltic Way - Spotlight Exhibits, August 22, 2018, exhibits.stanford.edu/baltic-way/feature/the-baltic-states-1918-2018.

8 “The Baltic Way: History,” The Baltic Way, 2021, www.thebalticway.eu/en/history/.

9 Lithuania.lt, “The Baltic Way: How Holding Hands Changed History,” Lithuania.lt, August 22, 2023, accessed August 4, 2025, lithuania.lt/news/life-and-work-in-lithuania/the-baltic-way-how-holding-hands-changed-history/.

10 Ronald J Misiunas and James H Bater, “Independence and the 20th Century,” Encyclopædia Britannica, July 6, 2025, www.britannica.com/place/Baltic-states/Soviet-republics.

11 Eitvydas Bajarūnas, Mare Haab, and Ilmars Viksne, “The Baltic States: Security and Defense After Independence,” Institute for Security Studies of Western European Union, June 19, 1995, www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/cp019e.pdf.

12 Amy Elson, “Baltic State Membership in the European Union: Developing a Common Asylum and Immigration Policy,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1997): Article 15, www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ijgls/vol5/iss1/15.

13 “Seven New Members Join NATO,” NATO update: Seven new members join NATO - 29 March 2004, March 29, 2004, www.nato.int/docu/update/2004/03-march/e0329a.htm.

14 Māris Āndžāns, “Three Decades of Baltic Military Cooperation and the Way Ahead - Foreign Policy Research Institute,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, March 5, 2025, www.fpri.org/article/2025/02/three-decades-of-baltic-military-cooperation-and-the-way-ahead/.

all are considered under attack.¹⁵ The Baltic states' membership in NATO was debated before they joined. Western leaders worried that the states might focus too much on regional interests. This could make them less cooperative in future united efforts.¹⁶ However, the greater concern was leaving them out. A power vacuum could make the region unstable and allow another country to take control. This could push Russian influence closer to central Europe, which neither side wanted. The Baltic states are also in a very strategic location. Their geography gives NATO an advantage in protecting the region and maintaining balance in Europe.¹⁷

NATO serves as a crucial security blanket for the Baltic States, as they rely heavily on NATO military aid. A key part of NATO's defense is their military presence. From 2004 to 2014, the tense relationship between the West and Russia began to simmer down due to NATO's expansion and Russia being complacent. However, this changed in 2014, when Russia invaded the Crimean Peninsula, a part of Ukraine.¹⁸ NATO responded by enhancing its military presence in the Baltic States. The new additions



Baltic Sea shipping port (Credit: Bernard Spragg)

were troops called tripwire forces. This was to protect the region, so if Russia were to move in on the Baltic States, they would be attacking other states' troops and thus escalating it to a more global scale.¹⁹

For the next two years, until 2016, NATO allies worked to form and test the Readiness Action Plan, or RAP.²⁰ This plan created clear measures to respond to threats along NATO borders.²¹ A key outcome was the formation of four multinational battlegroups. They

were deployed in 2017 and each led by a different NATO member. The battle groups were placed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. The United Kingdom led the forces in Estonia. Canada led the forces in Latvia. Germany led the forces in Lithuania, and the United States led the forces in Poland.²²

More recently, additional ships, planes, and troops were sent to Eastern and Southeastern NATO territory in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in

15 David G Haglund, "North Atlantic Treaty Organization," Encyclopædia Britannica, July 11, 2025, www.britannica.com/topic/North-Atlantic-Treaty-Organization.

16 Toivo U. Raun, "The Baltic States After The Collapse of The Soviet Union," ed. Peter van Ham, *Hungarian Studies*, no. 14/2 (July 2001): 275–85, doi.org/10.1556/HStud.15.2001.1.10.

17 Indra Ekmanis and Lukas Milevski, The Baltic States Mark Two Decades of NATO Membership, other, *Chain Reaction* (Foreign Policy Research Institute, May 7, 2024).

18 Ihor Stebelsky and Oleska Elisayovich, "The Crisis in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," Encyclopædia Britannica, July 12, 2025, www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-crisis-in-Crimea-and-eastern-Ukraine.

19 Ekmanis, Indra, and Lukas Milevski. *The Baltic States Mark Two Decades of NATO Membership*. Chain Reaction. Foreign Policy Research Institute, May 7, 2024.

20 Klaus Olshausen, rep., *NATO's Readiness Action Plan for Assurance and Deterrence – Progress & Challenges on the Road from Wales to Warsaw* (Berlin, Germany: Institut für Strategie- Politik- Sicherheits- und Wirtschaftsberatung ISPSW, 2016).

21 "NATO's Readiness Action Plan" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2016).

22 NATO, "Readiness Action Plan," December 28, 2023, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm; and "NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance," April 24, 2024, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm.



Bronze Soldier of Tallinn (Credit: Ken Mürk)

2022. In April 2024, Germany began to lay the foundation for increasing their military presence and to grow to over 5,000 troops by 2027. Latvia soon followed suit. In fact, in collaboration with Canada, they were the first to scale up to a multinational brigade. By 2026, they will have 2,200 Canadian troops stationed.²³

The Baltic states gain significant benefits from their partnership with NATO. At the same time, the relationship is not one-sided. NATO countries take advantage of the Baltic states' strategic location to strengthen their own security. In this way, both sides gain from the partnership.

Origins of Baltic Cyber Conflict

In 1944, Soviet troops entered Estonia's capital and liberated them from Nazi Germany. In commemoration of this victory, a two-meter-tall World War II Soviet soldier statue was erected. It was informally known as the "Bronze Soldier." However, this was not a momentous occasion for everyone, as it also marked the second USSR annexation of Estonia. This monument would survive over half a century unscathed. However, in the early 2000s, a conservative party, "Pro Patria Union," began to attempt to raise support for the

statues' removal. A few years later, they tried more direct approaches. In 2005, they covered the soldier in red paint.

By 2007, tensions between pro-Kremlin groups and Estonian nationalists reached a breaking point when the government relocated the Bronze Soldier statue from central Tallinn. For many ethnic Estonians, the monument symbolized Soviet occupation and decades of repression after World War II, while for Estonia's large Russian-speaking minority, it honored Red Army sacrifice and victory over fascism.²⁴ Moving it was therefore seen as erasing history by one side and correcting history by the other. The move sparked nights of rioting, vandalism, and clashes with police.

On April 27, the unrest was followed by a three-week wave of massive "denial of service" cyberattacks that overwhelmed Estonian servers and cut off access to banks, media outlets, and government websites. The impact was especially severe because Estonia was already one of the most digitally advanced societies in Europe. Its EEBone backbone network linked all government offices through secure internet, and citizens relied on electronic ID cards to vote online, check medical records, and file their taxes. In short, the attackers hit

²³ Nato, "NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance," NATO, April 24, 2024

²⁴ Rain Ottis, "Analysis of the 2007 Cyber Attacks Against Estonia from the Information Warfare Perspective" (Tallinn: Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, 2008).

not just symbols but the digital infrastructure at the heart of Estonia's daily life.²⁵

While many of the 2007 cyberattacks flooded non-critical services such as retail sites, others struck far more sensitive targets, including Estonia's foreign and defense ministries and its banks.²⁶ This marked a turning point in global perceptions of cybersecurity. Until then, cyber operations were mainly tools of espionage; now, for the first time, a state appeared to be using cyberattacks as a weapon against another state. Because attribution was murky, NATO's "all for one, one for all" Article 5 did not apply. The treaty only covers armed attacks when a responsible state can be clearly identified, and no conclusive evidence has tied Russia directly to the incident.

Even so, the attacks were a warning shot for Estonia and the world. They showed how easily federal computer defenses could be bypassed and how quickly vital services and everyday life could be disrupted. In response, Estonia reshaped its defenses. It created a Cyber Unit within the National Defense League, staffed by volunteers who protect networks and train citizens in digital resilience.²⁷ This mix of military

readiness and civic participation became a model for how small states can harden themselves against hybrid threats.

In 2008, Lithuania faced cyberattacks similar to Estonia's. Many believed Russia or Soviet supporters did them, but there is no clear evidence. The hackers hit about 300 websites and added Soviet symbols and anti-Lithuanian slogans.²⁸

These attacks followed a recent ban on Nazi and Soviet symbols. The Soviet national anthem had also been banned two weeks earlier.

Latvia had similar problems in 2009. Officials reported Distributed Denial of Service attacks (DDoS) on government websites. These attacks mostly hit defense and foreign ministry sites. People again suspected Russia or Soviet supporters, but no concrete proof was found. The Tallinn Manual says that these attacks are not full-scale "cyberattacks." They did not cause physical damage or stop websites

from working. Still, they broke the law, as they interfered with government work.²⁹

One result of Estonia's attack was the creation of the Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre for Excellence (CCDCOE) in May 2008. Estonia and six other countries founded it: Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Slovak Republic, and Spain. In October 2008, it officially partnered with NATO. The CCDCOE works on research, training, and policy. It also helps NATO improve its cyber defenses. The Steering Committee leads the center and its decisionmaking.³⁰

In 2009, the CCDCOE held its first cybersecurity conference, called CyCon. Experts from around the world share their research there. Experts from nearly fifty countries gathered. In 2013, they released the "Tallinn Manual on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Operations."³¹ The manual is not law, but it explains how international rules apply to cybersecurity during war and peace. It influences government policies. The manual is updated regularly, and the latest version, Tallinn 3.0, is still in progress.³²

25 "E-Estonia, the Information Society since 1997 - Centre for Public Impact," Center for Public Impact, 2019, centreforpublicimpact.org/public-impact-fundamentals/e-estonia-the-information-society-since-1997/.

26 Luke Harding, "Russia accused of unleashing cyberwar to disable Estonia," *The Guardian*, May 17, 2007, accessed [insert access date], <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/may/17/topstories3.russia>.

27 Damien McGuinness, "How a Cyber Attack Transformed Estonia," *BBC News*, April 27, 2017, accessed July 13, 2025, www.bbc.com/news/39655415.

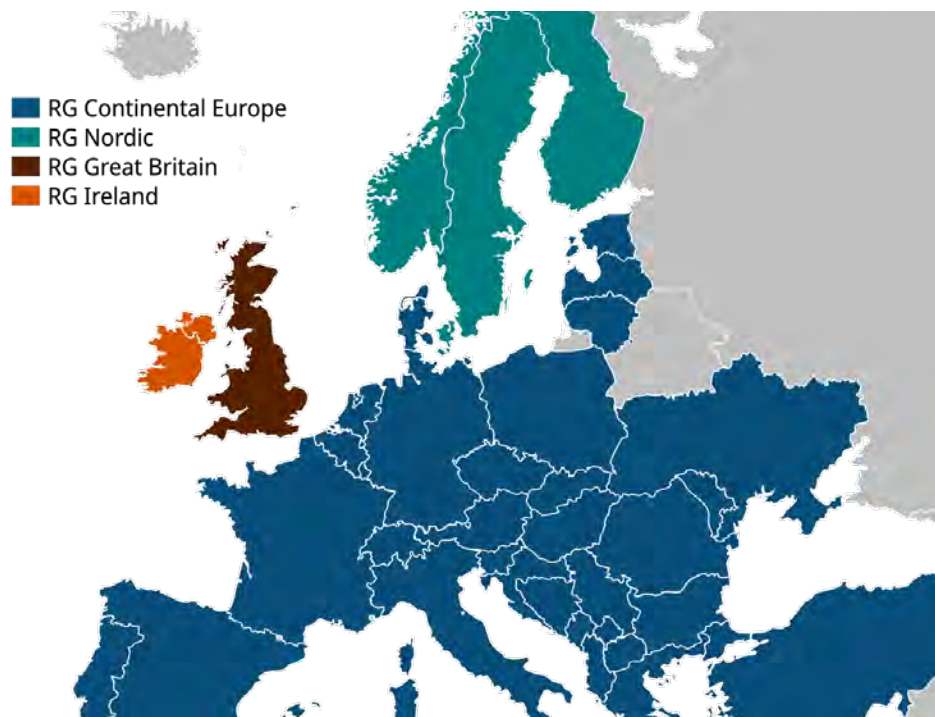
28 Pro-Russian hackers hit Lithuania, *RTÉ News*, June 30, 2008, accessed July 13, 2025, www.rte.ie/news/2008/0630/105150-lithuania.

29 Viksnins, "Cyberwarfare in Latvia, sec. "Malicious Cyber Operations Conducted by Russia in Latvia." *www.fpri.org/article/2020/06/cyberwarfare-in-latvia-a-call-for-new-cyberwarfare-terminology*.

30 "About Us," NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, accessed July 13, 2025, ccdcoe.org/about-us/.

31 "About Us," CCDCOE.

32 NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, "The Tallinn Manual," CCDCOE (Research), accessed August 10, 2025, ccdcoe.org/research/tallinn-manual/.



Energy grids in Europe post BRELL-break (Credit: Kimdime)

Three years earlier, NATO had added cyber defense to its main strategies. In 2010, at the Lisbon summit, leaders adopted a ten-year plan. The plan said cyber security is an important threat. It also said NATO would work to improve cyber defenses.³³ In 2021, NATO Allies agreed that serious cyberattacks could count as armed attacks. Then, NATO could use Article Five. This rule means an attack on one member is an attack on all.³⁴ The European Union has acted on cybersecurity too. In 2004, it created the European Network and Information Security Agency

(ENISA). This agency works to protect EU systems and aims to keep citizens safe online.³⁵

Estonia's 2007 cyberattack was not the first of its kind. It was big, but the tricks behind it are older. Back in the Cold War, the Soviet Union used the KGB to run information wars against the United States. Their goal was to mess with people's minds and make America look weak. Instead of hacking computers, they spread fake news and rumors.³⁶ They printed false stories in newspapers, ran secret radio stations, and even paid off foreign political parties to push their message. In the Estonia

example, instead of fake radio shows, there were denial-of-service attacks that knocked out websites. The goal was still to confuse people, cause chaos, and weaken the opponent without firing a single shot.

Russia's Federal Protective Service, the SVR (foreign intelligence), the Federal Security Service, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs work together to set Russia's cyber rules. They also plan and guide the country's cyber work. By 2007–2008, Moscow began testing offensive cyber tactics alongside conventional force. Estonia's 2007 cyberattack and the 2008 Russo-Georgian War both featured denial-of-service attacks, website defacements, and disinformation campaigns. While this was not yet the fully developed "hybrid warfare" seen in Crimea in 2014, it marked an important early stage in Russia's use of cyber tools as part of state conflict.³⁷

In 2013, Estonia announced the creation of a dedicated military cyber unit tasked with research, defense, offense, and development. Over the last decade, the Baltic states as a whole have become one of Russia's main testing grounds for cyber operations. Their close ties to NATO and sizable Russian-

33 NATO, "Allies Agree to Further Enhance Our Cyber Defence Capabilities," NATO (official text), accessed July 13, 2025, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68828.htm.

34 NATO, "Cyber Defence," NATO, accessed July 13, 2025, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_78170.htm.

35 European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA), "Who We Are," ENISA, accessed August 10, 2025, www.enisa.europa.eu/about-enisa/who-we-are.

36 Seth G. Jones, "Russia's Shadow War Against the West," Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 18, 2025, accessed July 13, 2025, www.csis.org/analysis/russias-shadow-war-against-west.

37 James K. Wither, "Hybrid Warfare," *per Concordiam* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2020), accessed July 13, 2025, www.marshallcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-05/pC_V10N1_en_Wither.pdf.

speaking populations have made them especially attractive targets for these kinds of attacks.³⁸

National and EU Cyber Defenses

Each Baltic state has developed national cybersecurity structures. Estonia established its Defense Forces' Cyber Command in 2018, which is responsible for offensive and defensive operations, supported by public education campaigns, cyber-hygiene training, and e-learning courses for civil servants.³⁹ Lithuania followed with the creation of the Lithuanian Armed Forces Cyber Defence Command (LTCYBERCOM), proposed in 2024 and launched in 2025, consolidating all cyber operations under the Ministry of Defence. Within the last two years, Estonia alone has logged over 6,500 cyberattacks, underscoring the scale of the challenge.⁴⁰

In February 2025, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania disconnected from the Russian-controlled BRELL power grid and synchronized with the European network. BRELL stands for Belarus, Russia, Estonia,

Latvia, and Lithuania. It was a 2001 deal to use Russia's energy grid.⁴¹ Leaving BRELL carried new risks of cyber sabotage and disinformation campaigns targeting critical infrastructure. Estonian grid operators even removed outside VPN access as a precaution. A NATO summit report that year also warned that states bordering Russia (Estonia, Finland, and Poland) would remain prime targets for sabotage.⁴²

ENISA has been pivotal in shaping Europe's cyber defenses. It has driven initiatives such as the Cyber Resilience Act, which introduced an EU-wide certification scheme for information and communication technology, and the NIS2 Directive, which expanded requirements for protecting essential services and critical infrastructure. ENISA also launched the European Vulnerability Database (EUVD) to centralize information on digital weaknesses across the EU market.⁴³ Alongside these measures, the EU has introduced broader digital frameworks. Regulation (EU) 2024/1183 established the European Digital Identity Framework, part of the Digital Decade Policy Programme

2030, aiming to give citizens and businesses secure, interoperable online identification across all member states.

The EU has also moved to strengthen collective crisis response. In February 2025, the Cyber Solidarity Act (CSA) entered into force, creating a Europe-wide Cybersecurity Alert System, a Cybersecurity Emergency Mechanism, and a Cybersecurity Reserve of trusted private responders.⁴⁴ Joint EU drills, such as Digital Shield, now test member states' resilience against simulated ransomware and denial-of-service attacks.

One of the weakest points in Europe's cyber architecture lies beneath the Baltic Sea. More than 35 undersea cables, in waters averaging just 55 meters deep, carry internet and communications traffic.⁴⁵ With roughly 4,000 ships transiting the region, vulnerability is high. Since 2023, incidents have spiked. In October 2023, damage occurred to the Balticconnector gas pipeline and two Estonia–Finland cables, with both Chinese and Russian vessels detected nearby. In November 2024, a cable linking

38 Henrik Praks, *Russia's Hybrid Threat Tactics Against the Baltic Sea Region: From Disinformation to Sabotage*, Hybrid CoE Working Paper 32 (Helsinki: European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, May 2024), PDF.

39 "Estonian Cyber Security Company Provides Free Cyber Hygiene E-Learning in 12 Languages," CybExer Technologies, March 2020, accessed July 21, 2025, cybexer.com/news/free-cyber-hygiene-e-learning-in-12-languages.

40 "The Ministry of National Defence Is Establishing Lithuanian Armed Forces Cyber Defence Command," Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, April 9, 2024, accessed July 21, 2025, kam.lt/en/the-ministry-of-national-defence-is-establishing-lithuanian-armed-forces-cyber-defence-command/.

41 Reuters, "Baltic States Switch to European Power Grid, Ending Russia Ties," CNN, February 9, 2025, edition.cnn.com/2025/02/09/europe/baltic-states-leave-russia-power-grid/index.html.

42 *Russian Hybrid Threats Likely to Escalate Around 2025 NATO Summit, Putting European Critical Infrastructure at High Risk*, Industrial Cyber, June 23, 2025, accessed July 21, 2025, industrialcyber.co/reports/russian-hybrid-threats-likely-to-escalate-around-2025-nato-summit-putting-european-critical-infrastructure-at-high-risk/.

43 European Commission, "European Digital Identity (EUDI) Regulation," Shaping Europe's Digital Future, accessed August 4, 2025, digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/eudi-regulation/.

44 European Commission, "Cyber Solidarity," *Shaping Europe's Digital Future*, last updated July 9, 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/cyber-solidarity>.

45 "Undersea Cables Keep Us Connected," ShareAmerica, accessed July 21, 2025, share.america.gov/undersea-cables-keep-us-connected/.



Energy infrastructure facility in Kyiv after Russian drone attack (Credit: State Emergency Service of Ukraine)

Sweden and Lithuania severed, cutting one-fifth of Lithuania's internet. Another cable connecting Germany and Finland was damaged the next day. In December 2024, the BCS East-West Interlink and four more Estonia–Finland cables were severed, one by the Russian tanker *Eagle S*, later detained in Finland.⁴⁶

These events forced the EU to adopt a regional action plan emphasizing deterrence, recovery, and prevention, with investing in tougher cable technology,

expanding surveillance, and improving intelligence-sharing by 2026.

Dependence on Russian Energy

Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia first declared in 2007 that they wanted to leave the Russian-controlled BRELL grid and instead join the Continental European network. They had cited regional security concerns. The EU and Poland backed the move, and in 2018, a formal agreement set 2025 as the target year. This was finished

in February of 2025, when the three states disconnected from BRELL and successfully synchronized with the European grid.⁴⁷

Ukraine had planned to also disconnect in 2023, but the Russia-Ukraine war forced Ukraine to act faster. Ukraine disconnected in February 2022, and the switchover to the European grid happened rapidly. Russia responded to Ukraine's fast exit from the Russian grid by attacking its power system. This included nuclear power plants, energy substations, and coal and gas generators. These attacks left Ukrainians without power for long periods.⁴⁸

Many attacks happened just before winter. This made the effects of lost heating and electricity worse. Before winter 2024, Russia started a mass bombing campaign. It hit all types of power plants, both renewable and non-renewable. The attacks caused blackouts, leaving some areas with only a few hours of electricity each day. By August, Ukraine had lost about 60 percent of its total power generation. To relieve this loss, Ukraine had to import more electricity from Poland, a CBSS member state.⁴⁹

To address Ukraine's energy crisis in the long term, CBSS member states and the European Union have committed more aid. In June 2025, Norway, a CBSS member

⁴⁶ Sophie Himka, "Baltic Sea Undersea Cable Security," *Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies*, University of Washington, July 9, 2025, accessed July 21, 2025, jsis.washington.edu/news/baltic-sea-undersea-cable-security/.

⁴⁷ "Baltic States Cut Energy Ties with Russia, but New Risks Emerge," *Www.hhs.se*, 2025, www.hhs.se/en/about-us/news/site-publications/2025/baltic-states-energy-independence/.

⁴⁸ HANNA ARHIROVA and BARRY HATTON, "Latest 'Massive' Russian Aerial Attack Cuts Power to 1 Million Homes in Ukraine," *AP News*, November 28, 2024, apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-energy-infrastructure-4fd663599d47898be34aa858dcc48fdb.

⁴⁹ Suriya Jayanti, "Ukraine's Energy Sector Faces Its Biggest Crisis Yet," *TIME* (Time, August 10, 2024), time.com/7008613/ukraine-russia-power-sector-frontline/.

state, pledged 200 million USD to Ukraine. The goal is to rebuild Ukraine's power system.⁵⁰ This builds on earlier donations in 2025 and in 2024.⁵¹ Since 2022, Ukraine has also had to increase the use of nuclear energy. This is to make up for the loss of non-renewable resources caused by Russian airstrikes.⁵² Concerns include the effects of Russian strikes on Ukrainian nuclear sites. According to the UN, Russia's bombing campaign creates a high risk of nuclear disaster.⁵³

One example is the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station. It produces half of Ukraine's nuclear energy and is one of the largest plants in the world.⁵⁴ Since 2022, it has been under Russian control. The plant has lost power multiple times, leaving reactor fuel unable to cool. Sustained Russian attacks on plants like Zaporizhzhia could make it incredibly difficult to maintain the power needed to prevent a meltdown.

The danger of Ukraine's use of nuclear energy has created a problem for several Baltic states. These countries also use nuclear power. Large reactors in a war zone create serious safety and security



Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station (Credit: Ralf1969)

risks. Limiting nuclear energy would make Ukraine's energy crisis worse and could also hurt the nuclear industry in the Baltic states.

CBSS members would then have to use non-renewable energy. This goes against the CBSS goal to move the region to clean energy. Lithuania, for example, has explored options with French partners to revive nuclear capacity as part of its energy independence strategy.⁵⁵

Many European countries still import Russian natural gas. Several EU states initially depended heavily on Russian gas, though imports have fallen sharply since 2022. Germany and Poland have sought alternative suppliers. Nuclear power supporters say that expanding nuclear energy can reduce Europe's need for Russian gas. However, some European states, including Denmark and Germany, ban nuclear plants for safety reasons. These bans are partly influenced by nuclear disasters. One example

50 Krishna Pathak, "Europe's Silent Hero? Norway Steps in to Rebuild Ukraine's War-Torn Grid," *regtechtimes.com*, 2025, www.msn.com/en-us/politics/government/europe-s-silent-hero-norway-steps-in-to-rebuild-ukraine-s-war-torn-grid/ar-AA1IoMXv?ocid=BingNewsSerp.

51 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Norway Increases Support for Reconstruction Efforts in Ukraine," *Government.no*, April 23, 2025, www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/norway-increases-support-for-reconstruction-efforts-in-ukraine/id3098032/; Nordic Editor, "Norway and UNDP Cooperate to Rebuild Ukraine's Energy Infrastructure," *United Nations Western Europe*, October 25, 2024, unric.org/en/norway-and-undp-cooperate-to-rebuild-ukraines-energy-infrastructure/.

52 Suriya Jayanti, "Ukraine's Energy Sector Faces Its Biggest Crisis Yet," *TIME* (Time, August 10, 2024), time.com/7008613/ukraine-russia-power-sector-frontline/.

53 "Russian Strikes on Ukraine's Energy System Risks Nuclear Disaster: Rights Experts," *UN News*, November 25, 2024, en.news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1157441.

54 Leo Chiu, "EXPLAINED: What's the Big Deal with the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant?," *Kyiv Post*, April 28, 2025, www.kyivpost.com/post/51642.

55 Reuters Staff, "Lithuania Nuclear Firm SE Ignalina Signs Agreement with Newcleo," *Reuters*, July 9, 2025, www.reuters.com/business/energy/lithuania-nuclear-firm-se-ignalina-signs-agreement-with-newcleo-2025-07-09/.

is the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, where a Ukrainian nuclear reactor exploded, causing massive damage and fear.⁵⁶ European countries must weigh these trade-offs carefully as they plan for a more secure and sustainable energy future.

Baltic 2030: Sustainability, Labor, and the Blue Economy

Sustainable development refers to growing a region's workers, buildings, and well-being while saving resources for the future. The Baltic region is ahead of most of Europe and the world in sustainability. It does very well in biodiversity and clean energy. Still, it misses many goals set by the UN and CBSS.⁵⁷ The World Wildlife Fund states that the Baltic Sea region is the best place in the world to reach a "blue economy." A blue economy uses clean energy, renewable resources, and protects ecosystems.⁵⁸

The CBSS lists sustainable development as a main goal. To support this, the CBSS set up the Expert Group on Sustainable Development (EGSD). This group leads the organization's sustainability efforts. It also manages the Baltic 30 Action Plan. This plan works to meet the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable

Development Goals.⁵⁹ The CBSS also created other working groups. They help support the region's workers as the Baltic region moves to a greener economy. They also aim to make shipping more environmentally friendly. This is important, as the Baltics depend heavily on maritime trade.

In 2017, the CBSS launched the Baltic 2030 Action Plan as the region's roadmap for implementing the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁶⁰ The UN framework, adopted in 2015, sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. The Baltic plan translates those global goals into six priority areas tailored to the region.

The first, Partnerships for Sustainable Development (SDG 17), promotes cooperation between governments, businesses, and civil society, encouraging the sharing of technology and expertise. The second, Transition to a Sustainable Economy, links to multiple SDGs (2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, and 14) and focuses on areas such as sustainable farming, access to water, clean energy, marine protection, and circular economic practices.

Climate Action forms the third priority (SDG 13, with ties to SDGs 2, 3, 15, and 16), emphasizing stronger disaster response and the protection of

ecosystems. The fourth, Equality and Social Wellbeing for All (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 16), addresses poverty, gender inequality, and discrimination. It also supports children's rights and tackles the challenge of an aging workforce through initiatives like the Baltic Sea Labour Forum's Sustainable Working Life Project.

The fifth priority, Sustainable and Resilient Cities and Communities (SDG 11), calls for careful city planning and stronger cooperation between urban and rural areas. Finally, Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All (SDG 4) promotes STEM education and skills development to help citizens adapt to rapid changes in the job market.

In 2012, the CBSS created the Baltic Sea Labour Forum. Its goal is to work with labor unions. The forum helps meet SDGs and focuses on fairness and workers' rights.⁶¹ Each CBSS member and observer sends one representative to the Steering Committee. The committee has five main priorities: labor mobility and migration, demographic challenges and lifelong learning, knowledge supply, youth employment, and an inclusive labor market.⁶²

Europe is aging fast. Since 2014, the number of workers over 55 has grown by 16.2 million. Older

⁵⁶ Rosie Frost, "Nuclear Power: Why Is It Such a Divisive Issue in Europe?," euronews, April 1, 2024, www.euronews.com/green/2024/04/01/europe-is-divided-on-nuclear-power-which-countries-are-for-and-against-it.

⁵⁷ "Baltic Sustainability Report," 2023, startin.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/BSA-2023-_-Baltic-Report.pdf.

⁵⁸ "Sustainable Blue Economy," WWF Baltic, n.d., www.wwfbaltic.org/our-work/sustainable-finance/sustainable-blue-economy.

⁵⁹ CBSS, "Sustainable Development – CBSS," CBSS, 2025, cbss.org/sustainable-prosperous-region/sustainable-development/.

⁶⁰ "Realizing the Vision: The Baltic 2030 Action Plan Marking 25 Years of Building Collaboration and Trust," accessed July 13, 2025, cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Baltic-2030-Action-Plan.pdf.

⁶¹ CBSS, "Baltic Sea Labour Forum – CBSS," CBSS, 2025, cbss.org/cbss-bodies/other-bodies/baltic-sea-labour-forum-2/.

⁶² CBSS, "Baltic Sea Labour Forum."

workers face many challenges, as the labor market changes quickly.⁶³ The Sustainable Working Life Project helps with an aging workforce and population changes. The project looks at working conditions for older workers and aims to keep jobs available for them. It studies policies and makes recommendations.⁶⁴

The forum also supports the Baltic 2030 Action Plan. Their education initiatives help workers learn new skills and use sustainable practices.

The Expert Group on Sustainable Maritime Economy (EGSME) works to make the Baltic Sea region's maritime industries stronger and more sustainable. This is important for the economy and environment. The group promotes clean shipping practices, supports the use of new digital tools, and encourages the growth of new industries like maritime tourism. The EGSME has one high-level diplomat from each member state. They each meet to share ideas and plan actions and improve cooperation among its members.⁶⁵

During Estonia's presidency of the CBSS in 2024–2025, the Expert Group on Sustainable Maritime Economy (EGSME) highlighted two priority projects: green shipping corridors and digital twins. Green shipping corridors are



Algae bloom in the Baltic Sea (Credit: European Space Agency)

routes designed to eliminate carbon emissions from maritime transport. According to a 2025 EGSME report, shipping in the Baltic Sea alone produces about one percent of global shipping emissions. This is roughly 14,000 kilotons of carbon dioxide each year.⁶⁶ The UN's International Maritime Organization has announced plans for four such corridors in the Baltic, though none are yet operational.⁶⁷ The EGSME's role is to develop common standards and encourage cooperation, including public-private partnerships, to help make these zero-emission

routes possible. The second project, digital twins, involves building a detailed virtual model of the Baltic Sea using environmental data. These digital models allow scientists and policymakers to run simulations, test scenarios, and plan infrastructure, such as the future green shipping corridors, with more precision.⁶⁸

Much like the rest of Europe, the Baltic states have struggled with high inflation and supply chain disruptions in the past few years. The Russia-Ukraine war has contributed to a number of these

63 "Keeping Older Workers in the Labour Force | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions," Europa.eu, 2025, www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/2025/keeping-older-workers-labour-force.

64 CBSS, "BSLF Sustainable Working Life Project – CBSS," CBSS, 2025, cbss.org/projects-cbss/completed-projects/sustainable-working-life/.

65 CBSS, "Expert Group on Sustainable Maritime Economy – CBSS," CBSS, 2025, cbss.org/cbss-bodies/egsme/.

66 "BASELINE REPORT on MARINE DIGITAL TWINS and GREEN SHIPPING CORRIDORS in the BALTIC SEA REGION Council of the Baltic Sea States Expert Group on Sustainable Maritime Economy 2 Compiled by the Ministry of Climate of the Republic of Estonia," accessed July 13, 2025, cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/baseline-report-on-marine-digital-twins-and-green-shipping-corridors-in-the-baltic-sea-region-2.pdf.

67 "Green Corridors – IMO," Imo.org, 2024, futurefuels.imo.org/home/future-insight/innovation/green-corridors/.

68 CBSS, "Estonian CBSS Presidency Releases Baseline Report on Marine Digital Twins and Green Shipping Corridors – CBSS," CBSS, 2025, cbss.org/2025/06/05/estonian-cbss-presidency-releases-baseline-report-on-marine-digital-twins-and-green-shipping-corridors/.



Nord Stream pipeline construction (Credit: Bair175)

issues, leading to high prices and supply chain issues for agricultural products, oil and gas, and food, particularly grain.⁶⁹ Additionally, the Baltic region's previously discussed reliance on Russian electricity and the recent transition of several states to a new electrical grid have led to a surge in energy prices.⁷⁰ When energy prices rise too high and too fast, the result is inflation across the board.⁷¹ This means that the Baltic region, which has borne the brunt of Russian

aggression outside of Ukraine, is dealing with the effects of the war indirectly, as Baltic consumers are met with high prices for household necessities.

High inflation often negatively impacts the labor market, including slow job growth.⁷² Failure to address this issue in the Baltic Sea region could jeopardize the Council's ability to address issues of sustainable development that involve the creation of green jobs, and a strong private sector.

Nord Stream Attacks

The Nord Stream pipelines carry Russian natural gas directly to Germany through the Baltic Sea, bypassing overland routes in Eastern Europe.⁷³ Together, Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 consist of four parallel pipelines, each stretching about 1,200 kilometers from Russia's Baltic coast to northeastern Germany.⁷⁴ The projects are corporate-owned, but the Russian state company Gazprom holds a controlling stake and decisive influence. The pipelines cross the exclusive economic zones of Finland, Sweden, and Denmark, which had to grant permits for construction. Other Baltic Sea states, including Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, were consulted because of the project's regional security and environmental implications, though the pipelines do not run through their waters.⁷⁵

Construction of Nord Stream 2 in 2021 faced opposition from the United States. The United States, a CBSS observer state, feared that the construction of a new natural gas pipeline primarily owned by a Russian company would increase

69 Dario Caldara et al., "The Effect of the War in Ukraine on Global Activity and Inflation," *Federal Reserve*, May 27, 2022, www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/the-effect-of-the-war-in-ukraine-on-global-activity-and-inflation-20220527.html; GEP, "Russia-Ukraine War: Global Impact on Logistics | GEP Blogs," GEP website, September 13, 2022, www.gep.com/blog/mind/russia-ukraine-war-logistics-impact; Irma Janauskaitė, "New Wave of Inflation? Food Prices in Lithuania Expected to Rise," *lrt.lt*, February 25, 2025, www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2495871/new-wave-of-inflation-food-prices-in-lithuania-expected-to-rise.

70 EADaily, "EADaily," EADaily, February 13, 2025, eadaily.com/en/news/2025/02/13/after-leaving-the-brell-the-baltic-states-do-not-let-go-of-high-electricity-prices.

71 Alice Fan, "High Inflation in the Baltics: Disentangling Inflation Dynamics and Its Impact on Competitiveness," *IMF Working Papers* 2024, no. 061 (March 2024): 1, doi.org/10.5089/9798400270826.001.

72 Lauren Winans, "How Inflation Affects the Labor Market," *Forbes*, November 1, 2022, www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/11/01/how-inflation-affects-the-labor-market/.

73 Nord Stream AG, "The Pipeline," Nord Stream AG, 2025, www.nord-stream.com/the-project/pipeline/.

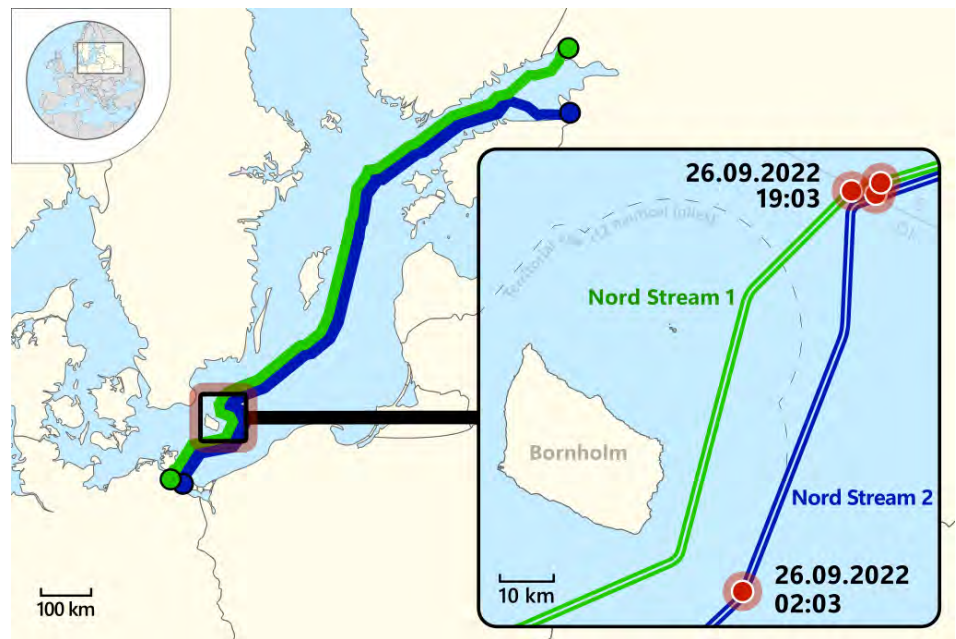
74 Nord Stream AG, "The Pipeline."

75 Moran, "Can Nord Stream Really Rise from the Dead?," Atlantic Council, April 29, 2025, www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/energysource/can-nord-stream-really-rise-from-the-dead/.

the influence of Russia in Europe.⁷⁶ They worried that Western Europe may become more dependent on Russia. Politicians in opposition to Nord Stream 2 also pointed out that constructing this pipeline would cut Ukraine out of the natural gas transport process. Ukraine would lose revenue as a result of this. Germany, however, was a vocal proponent of Nord Stream 2. Germany was a leading purchaser of Russian natural gas at the time and promoted the project by stating an additional source of gas would increase their energy security.⁷⁷

Throughout 2022, Russia had begun to shut off service in Nord Stream 1, limiting the pipeline's capacity by around 80 percent. This was likely an attempt to strong-arm Western Europe into limiting support to Ukraine.⁷⁸ This is symptomatic of the larger problem of Europe's reliance on Russian oil and gas. In the early days of the Russia-Ukraine War, approximately 45 percent of Europe's natural gas originated in Russia.⁷⁹

In September of 2022, four underwater explosions targeted the Nord Stream pipelines. The explosions hit both Nord Stream 1 and 2. The explosions caused gas leaks that released petroleum and natural gas into the surrounding Baltic Sea. At the time of the



Nord Stream attack map (Credit: FactsWithoutBias1)

explosion, only Nord Stream 1 was actively transporting gas at a high capacity; however, both pipelines contained gas. Nord Stream 2 was non-operational because its use had been suspended by Germany shortly after construction, due to concerns over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The explosions hit pipes A and B of Nord Stream 1, and pipe A of Nord Stream 2 twice. Three of the attacks were concentrated in the northern part of the Baltic Sea, in Sweden's exclusive economic zone. This is close to where Nord Streams 1 and

2 branch apart. The third took place further South, in Denmark's exclusive economic zone.⁸⁰ As a result, three of the attacks fell within the initial jurisdiction of Swedish authorities, while the fourth fell within Denmark's jurisdiction. The blasts were detected by seismologists, scientists who study earthquake tremors, at 2:03 am and 7:04 pm on September 26. Because the gas had originated in Russia and was bound for Germany, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark all launched independent investigations into the attack.

⁷⁶ "Fact Sheet on U.S. Opposition to Nord Stream 2 - United States Department of State," United States Department of State, December 2020, 2017-2021.state.gov/fact-sheet-on-u-s-opposition-to-nord-stream-2/.

⁷⁷ Matthew Karnitschnig, "Why Merkel Chose Russia over US on Nord Stream 2," POLITICO, July 26, 2021, www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-german-chancellors-nord-stream-russia-energy-angela-merkel/.

⁷⁸ Melissa Eddy and Patricia Cohen, "Seeking Leverage over Europe, Putin Says Russian Gas Flow Will Resume," *The New York Times*, July 20, 2022, sec. Business, www.nytimes.com/2022/07/20/business/energy-environment/nordstream-putin-russian-gas.html.

⁷⁹ "How Much of Europe's Gas Comes from Russia?," 2024, www.naturalgasintel.com/questions/how-much-of-europes-gas-comes-from-russia/.

⁸⁰ Kevin Hurler, "Germany Suspects Sabotage over Nord Stream Gas Pipeline Leaks," Gizmodo, September 27, 2022, gizmodo.com/germany-pipeline-russia-sabotage-nord-stream-1849586472.

The Swedish and Danish investigations closed in early 2024 without naming any suspects.⁸¹ However, they determined that the cause of the explosions was “gross sabotage.” This means that the explosions were an intentional attack meant to stop the transportation of Russian gas to mainland Europe.⁸² Germany’s investigation is ongoing and has explored multiple leads, including when, in June 2024, German authorities issued an arrest warrant for a suspect in connection to the attacks.⁸³ The suspect was a Ukrainian national linked to a yacht called the Andromeda. The yacht was found to contain traces of the same explosives that were used in the attack and was spotted near the Nord Stream Pipelines shortly before the attacks.⁸⁴ German authorities believe that the suspect fled Poland, and is currently located in Ukraine.

Investigators also suspect the involvement of others who have not yet been identified. Because of the suspect’s ties to Ukraine, the sabotage might have been the work of extremists supporting Ukraine.

The German investigation also found that Russian military ships and submarines were spotted near the pipelines in the days and weeks leading up to the attack. This has led some to theorize that Russia was behind the sabotage.⁸⁵ This is supported by the fact that the yacht was rented from a woman with ties to Russia.

As of 2025, German investigators have not been able to determine the attackers’ motives for planting the explosives.

They have also not determined whether attackers were acting out of support for Russia or Ukraine. The investigation seems to be leaning toward the conclusion that the attack was not ordered by either government.

When the investigation was announced, Russia expressed concern that the results would be inaccurate or biased. Russia petitioned the United Nations

Security Council to open an independent investigation, but this motion was denied.⁸⁶ If the Nord Stream sabotage was not conducted by the Russian or Ukrainian government, it highlights the involvement of independent actors in the war. Russia, Ukraine, and Poland have all been quick to deny responsibility and disavow the actions of the perpetrators.⁸⁷

Both Ukraine and Russia had motives to disrupt the pipeline. Ukraine’s motive was that the pipeline was an important source of revenue for Russia. Russia’s motive was that a disruption could harm Ukraine’s allies who rely on Russia for natural gas. It is important to note that Russia has a history of sabotage in the Baltic Sea.

Even if Russia was not responsible for the Nord Stream attack, there are energy and communication pipelines in the Baltic Sea that remain vulnerable targets. Attacks on Baltic Sea infrastructure have immediate environmental impacts and long-term economic impacts for consumers in the Baltics.⁸⁸

81 Jan M. Olsen, “Denmark Closes Probe into Nord Stream Blasts Saying There’s Not Enough Grounds for a Criminal Case,” AP News, February 26, 2024, apnews.com/article/denmark-nord-stream-pipeline-explosion-investigation-sweden-germany-8fe8be53ff1c10b11ec2d0ad1d8dd615.

Rebecca R Ruiz and David E Sanger, “Sweden Closes Investigation into Nord Stream Pipeline Explosions,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 2024, www.nytimes.com/2024/02/07/world/europe/sweden-nord-stream-pipeline.html.

82 Laura Gozzi, “Nord Stream: Denmark Closes Investigation into Pipeline Blast,” *Www.bbc.com*, February 26, 2024, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68401870.

83 Damien McGuinness, “Nord Stream: German Arrest Warrant for Sabotage Blast Suspect,” *Bbc.com* (BBC News, August 14, 2024), www.bbc.com/news/articles/cnvyz1472rpo.

84 Michelle Nichols, “Germany Tells UN: Nord Stream Inquiry Found Subsea Explosive Traces on Yacht,” *Reuters*, July 11, 2023, www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-tells-un-nord-stream-inquiry-found-subsea-explosive-traces-yacht-2023-07-11.

85 Gordon Corera, “Nord Stream: Report Puts Russian Navy Ships near Pipeline Blast Site,” *BBC News*, May 3, 2023, sec. Europe, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65461401.

86 “At Security Council Meeting on Sabotage of Nord Stream Pipeline, Many Speakers Condemn Attacks on Critical Infrastructure, Stress Need for Accountability | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases,” *Un.org*, October 4, 2024, press.un.org/en/2024/sc15844.doc.htm.

87 Darko Janjevic, “Nord Stream Sabotage: How Are the Key Players Reacting?,” *dw.com* (Deutsche Welle, August 16, 2024), www.dw.com/en/nord-stream-sabotage-how-are-key-players-reacting/a-69964635.

88 Mark Bowden, “The Most Consequential Act of Sabotage in Modern Times,” *The Atlantic*, December 13, 2023, www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2023/12/nord-stream-pipeline-attack-theories-suspects-investigation/676320/.

The Nord Stream pipeline will likely remain shut down indefinitely. Russian gas still enters Europe through other pipelines, such as the TurkStream and Yamal pipelines. The European Union plans to end Russian gas imports by 2027. The Nord Stream sabotage provided a shock to Europe about Russian gas reliance and accelerated the process of reducing dependence. If the German investigation discovers that Russia was involved in the attack, this will encourage European powers to completely transition away from Russian

energy. If the German investigation determines that the sabotage was the work of Ukrainians, Russia may use that fact for additional leverage. However, Germany has stated that issuing an arrest warrant for a Ukrainian citizen does not affect their support for Ukraine. This indicates that the results of the investigation will likely not have a significant effect on European support for Ukraine.

The European Union has a stated commitment to diversifying natural gas sources with a plan in place

to eliminate Russian fossil fuel imports by 2027. The plan calls for an end to new contracts by 2025 and a complete end to Russian gas imports by 2027.⁸⁹ Since the Nord Stream attack, European dependence on Russian energy has fallen to approximately 19 percent overall. This is a 7 percent decrease. In July of 2025, the European Parliament voted to reaffirm these commitments and to bolster domestic clean energy production.⁹⁰

CURRENT STATUS

The Shadow Fleet and the Battle for Baltic Waters

For years, Russia has relied on a “shadow fleet” of older, poorly regulated oil tankers to skirt international sanctions. Similar fleets have been used by other sanctioned states such as Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela, but Russia’s fleet has expanded dramatically since the full-scale

invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Estimates suggest it now numbers hundreds of vessels, many sailing under flags of convenience or without valid insurance.⁹¹

In April 2025, Estonia detained the tanker *Kiwala* over registration and safety deficiencies. The ship was released once the issues were corrected, but the incident highlighted how Baltic states are monitoring sanction-evading vessels more closely.⁹² A month

later, Estonia attempted to stop another tanker, the *Jaguar*, as it traveled through Estonia’s Exclusive Economic Zone. During the operation, a Russian Su-35 fighter briefly crossed into Estonian airspace, which is a violation of NATO territory.⁹³ This appeared to mark the first direct use of Russian military force to shield a shadow fleet vessel.⁹⁴ Portuguese jets on NATO’s Baltic Air Policing mission responded to the incursion, monitoring the situation but not

89 “In Focus: Reducing the EU’s Dependence on Imported Fossil Fuels,” European Commission, April 20, 2022, commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/focus-reducing-eus-dependence-imported-fossil-fuels-2022-04-20_en; “Roadmap to Fully End EU Dependency on Russian Energy,” European Commission, May 6, 2025, commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/roadmap-fully-end-eu-dependency-russian-energy-2025-05-06_en.

90 European Interest/Energy and European Interest/Energy, “Parliament Calls for EU Energy Security and to Turn off Russian Energy Imports,” European Interest, July 9, 2025, www.europeaninterest.eu/parliament-calls-for-eu-energy-security-and-to-turn-off-russian-energy-imports/.

91 European Parliament Research Service, *The EU–Russia Maritime Cable Sabotage Threat in the Baltic: Analysis of the Baltic States’ Energy and Telecommunications Vulnerability*, EPRS Briefing, June 2024, [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/766242/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)766242_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/766242/EPRS_BRI(2024)766242_EN.pdf).

92 “Experts: Estonia’s Failed Shadow Fleet Tanker Operation Reveals Shortcomings,” *ERR News*, accessed July 19, 2025, news.err.ee/1609697184/experts-estonia-s-failed-shadow-fleet-tanker-operation-reveals-shortcomings.

93 “Estonia Moves to Counter Threats from Russia’s ‘Shadow Fleet,’” *DefenseScoop*, May 13, 2025, defensescoop.com/2025/05/13/estonia-counter-threats-russia-shadow-fleet/.

94 Paul Stronski, *Baltic–Russia Maritime Cable Sabotage: Threat Assessments*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2025, carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/06/baltic-russia-maritime-cable-sabotage?lang=en.



European Parliament (Credit: Diliff)

engaging. The Jaguar eventually returned to Russian waters. According to the Estonian Defence Forces, the episode demonstrates that monitoring and sanctioning the shadow fleet is effective and that such efforts must be further intensified.⁹⁵

Later in May, Estonia's Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur warned of the risks posed by these ships. Many are single-hull tankers, and the Baltic Sea's shallow waters would make it far less able to absorb a major spill than the open ocean. As he noted, "When something happens, the Atlantic might handle it—but the Baltic Sea cannot."⁹⁶

This environmental danger, combined with the rising security dimension, has led Estonia and its allies to intensify efforts to track shadow fleet traffic and prepare for possible escalation.

Back in January, several ships were reported entering Estonian and wider Baltic Sea waters, causing damage to undersea infrastructure. In response, NATO launched a new initiative called "Baltic Sentry."⁹⁷ Three major commands oversee the mission. The Allied Command Operations (ACO) is responsible for planning and executing all NATO operations. Under it, the Joint Force Command Brunssum

(JFCBS) in the Netherlands helps direct military operations on the ground. The maritime component comes from the Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM), NATO's hub for naval operations and its principal maritime advisor.⁹⁸

The program began as a test project and used a small fleet of naval drones as national surveillance assets. But its mission expanded as threats to undersea cables and pipelines grew. Baltic Sentry now deploys drones, maritime patrol aircraft, and integrates national surveillance systems to strengthen NATO's presence in the region. As US Army General Christopher G. Cavoli stated, the initiative "will deliver focused deterrence throughout the Baltic Sea and counter destabilizing acts like those observed in December 2024."⁹⁹

Since 2023, Estonia has been suffering attacks on their undersea communications and infrastructure, with 10 cables damaged. One recent incident was in December 2024. Four vital communication lines between Finland and Estonia were cut, which impacted both of the states' energy supplies. Behind it was an alleged ship that is believed to be a part of the "shadow fleet," which was detained by Finland.

95 "Estonia Says Russian 'Shadow Fleet' Tanker Can't Sail Without Resolving 40 Deficiencies," *The Insider (Russia)*, accessed July 19, 2025, theinsider.ru/en/news/282180.

96 Brandi Vincent, "Estonia moves to counter threats from Russia's 'shadow fleet,'" *DefenseScoop*, May 13, 2025, accessed August 4, 2025, defensescoop.com/2025/05/13/estonia-counter-threats-russia-shadow-fleet/.

97 "NATO Launches 'Baltic Sentry' to Increase Critical Infrastructure Security," *NATO*, January 14, 2025, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_232122.htm.

98 NATO, "Mission," Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM), accessed August 4, 2025, mc.nato.int/about-marcom/mission-.

99 "NATO Launches 'Baltic Sentry,'" *NATO*, January 14, 2025.

Numerous countries have contributed resources to the Baltic Sentry.¹⁰⁰ Sweden, which joined NATO in 2024, made its first military deployment to the Baltic Sea: an ASC 890 surveillance aircraft, three warships, and additional coast guard assets, including four ships and seven standby vessels. Germany also contributed. In April 2025, the Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFCBS) oversaw the first operational deployment of the German Heron TP unarmed drone. This system has greatly advanced NATO's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities by providing real-time updates across the region.¹⁰¹ Beyond preventing incidents, Baltic Sentry is also designed to ensure that consequences are imposed on perpetrators.¹⁰²

The initiative, however, faces two significant challenges. The first is limited maritime capacity. Even with NATO's increased presence, the sheer scale of critical undersea infrastructure (CUI) makes it impossible to protect every cable or pipeline. The Baltic Sea handles about 15 percent of global container shipping, with over 4,000 vessels passing

through daily—far too many to monitor comprehensively.¹⁰³ Many of NATO's deployed assets were not designed for continuous cable surveillance. While unmanned surface vehicles and underwater sensors are now in use—roughly 20 are currently deployed—these systems have their own shortcomings. Unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs), for example, have limited communication range and cannot reliably operate at the depths required to monitor undersea networks. The 2025 workplan of the European Defence Fund now prioritizes developing “great depth enabling technologies” and an “advanced underwater network” to address this gap. The second challenge is limited legal authority.

Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), boarding foreign ships in the EEZ is highly constrained except in specific cases. Enforcement must go through the courts of the ship's flag state, a slow, politically fraught process that often fails to produce meaningful results. This legal gray zone allows hostile actors to exploit and weaponize

maritime law, leaving NATO with few options for deterrence or retaliation.¹⁰⁴

Civil and Military Defense in the Baltics

In the January 2024 Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) country report for the Baltic states, Vladimir Putin made public threats to all three countries.

One specific comment raised many alarms for Latvia when the Russian leader asserted that Russian-speaking Latvians “will be treated like pigs in their own country.”¹⁰⁵ With comments like these and their more recent hybrid attacks, it would be imprudent for the Baltic States to underestimate Russia's capabilities. Additionally, otherwise reliable allies, such as the United States and Germany, have increased uncertainty in the security and safety of the countries.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania each have their own particular plans for self-defense. All three have consistently met NATO's 2 percent of GDP spending pledge since 2014. Latvia and Lithuania aim to raise this to 3 percent by 2027, while Estonia has committed

100 “NATO Launches Baltic Sentry to Deter Undersea Sabotage,” *The Watch Journal*, February 26, 2025, thewatch-journal.com/2025/02/26/nato-launches-baltic-sentry-to-deter-undersea-sabotage/#:~:text=NATO%20ALLIED%20MARITIME%20COMMAND,%2C%20Germany%2C%20Lithuania%20and%20Finland.

101 “NATO Baltic Sentry 2025: JFC Brunssum Leads First Deployment of German Heron TP for Regional Security,” *Joint Force Command Brunssum*, published approximately April 2025, jfcbs.nato.int/page5964943/2025/nato-baltic-sentry-2025-jfc-brunssum-leads-first-deployment-of-german-heron-tp-for-regional-security.

102 Juraj Majcin, “Battle of the Baltic: Safeguarding Critical Undersea Infrastructure,” *European Policy Centre*, April 22, 2025, www.epc.eu/publication/Battle-of-the-Baltic-Safeguarding-critical-undersea-infrastructure-645780/.

103 “As Sabotage Allegations Swirl, NATO Struggles to Secure the Baltic Sea,” *Reuters*, December 3, 2024, www.reuters.com/world/sabotage-allegations-swirl-nato-struggles-secure-baltic-sea-2024-12-03/.

104 Majcin, “Battle of the Baltic,” *EPC*, 2025, www.epc.eu/publication/Battle-of-the-Baltic-Safeguarding-critical-undersea-infrastructure-645780/.

105 Alexandra Clobes, Oliver Morwinsky, and Fausta Šimaitytė, *Baltic Bastions: New Defence Strategies for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia*, Country Report, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Office Baltic States, January 2024.



Russian oil rig (Credit: ShavPS)

to around 3 percent as well.¹⁰⁶ The promise of the NATO alliance is through a three-pronged strategy. This includes armed defensive capacities, national mobilization of defense capabilities, including global partnered training, and civilian resistance. These large jumps in contribution to national security and defense go to show how seriously countries are taking potential threats to the region.

In the final quarter of 2023, Latvia passed the “Latvia Defense Concept” with a focus on both military and societal resilience. This new plan entails both peace and wartime strategies. These

include deterrence, defense capacity, building up resilience, and nurturing “the ability and will” among the civilian population to defend the country. Year to date, defense spending is up to 3.45 percent of their GDP and is expected to be 5 percent by 2027. In addition, Latvia also has a target of 12,000 National Guards, a volunteer force, by 2027 and is even expected to surpass this goal before then. The state is also working toward upgrading their military systems. More advanced systems like HIMARS rocket launchers, IRIS-T air-to-air missiles, and coastal defense missiles are beginning to be deployed.¹⁰⁷

The societal portion of this concept is focused on the will of the people. Volunteers are the groundwork of the state’s cybersecurity unit of the National Guard as well as the Latvian military.¹⁰⁸ Aside from volunteer work, Latvia is working toward implementing defense education in all schools, starting with the 2024-2025 school year. In addition, Latvia has also been enhancing its cooperation with NATO allies through the State Partnership Program (SPP). This cooperation is focused on fostering military engagement and interagency relationships between the Michigan National Guard and the Latvian National Armed Forces.¹⁰⁹ Some examples include joint exercises between the two national guards and the sharing of information. The end goal of this program is enhancing Latvian security and military defense.

Estonia also formulated a new defense plan for itself in the beginning of 2024. The plan was originally conceived as a decade-long strategy starting in 2021 and ending in 2031; however, it has now been moved up with a hoped-for completion date of 2027. The top priority is acquiring medium-range artillery and air defense systems, armored tactical support weaponry (such as tanks), and self-propelled

106 U.S. Department of Defense, “Baltic States Pledge to Meet NATO’s 5% GDP Military Target,” Defense.gov, July 25, 2025, accessed August 4, 2025, www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4255675/baltic-states-pledge-to-meet-natos-5-gdp-military-target/.

107 Armands Astukevičs and Hans Binnendijk, “Inside Latvia’s Race against Time to Build Deterrence against Russia,” *Atlantic Council*, May 15, 2025, www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/inside-latvias-race-against-time-to-build-deterrence-against-russia/#:~:text=Since%20Russia's%20full%2Dscale%20invasion,from%20diverse%20sources%20of%20manpower.

108 Marija Golubeva, “Latvians Prepare as the ‘Long Peace’ Ends,” *Europe’s Edge* (Center for European Policy Analysis), March 31, 2025, cepa.org/article/latvians-prepare-as-the-long-peace-ends/.

109 U.S. National Guard Bureau, *State Partnership Program*, Joint Staff J-5 International Affairs Division, accessed July 20, 2025, www.nationalguard.mil/Leadership/Joint-Staff/J-5/International-Affairs-Division/State-Partnership-Program/.

artillery (quick-maneuvering operating vehicles carrying field guns, howitzers, mortar rocket, and missile launchers). Additionally, Estonia aims to have a division of armed and well-trained civilian soldiers within the Estonian army that will add more than 50 percent recruits. Conscription in Estonia is mandatory for men, and in Lithuania and Latvia, women can volunteer.¹¹⁰

Lithuania has also accelerated defense planning. The country reinstated conscription in 2015, and it continues to expand its forces and aims to raise defense spending toward 3 percent of GDP. Its modernization includes HIMARS artillery, advanced air defenses like NASAMS and IRIS-T, and coastal anti-ship missiles. Germany has also pledged a permanent brigade deployment, making Lithuania a central hub for NATO's eastern flank.¹¹¹ Like its neighbors, Lithuania also stresses total defense, building up civil defense, youth training, and volunteer organizations such as the Riflemen's Union.



Industrial robots: banned exports under the sanctions agreement
(Credit: Clemenspool)

Economic Measures and Sanctions

In July of 2025, the European Union announced new sanctions against Russian crude oil as part of the European Union's goal of ending European reliance on Russian oil. The sanctions include a price cap on the sale of Russian crude oil, now set at 47.60 USD, which is equivalent to about 85 percent of the market price. This round of sanctions represents the 18th package of sanctions put forward by the European Union,

since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022.¹¹² Price caps on Russian oil had previously been set at 60 USD per barrel; however, this had not done much to limit Russian oil profits. The goal of the sanction is to limit the profits that Russia can derive from these sales in participating countries.¹¹³

Reduced profits are meant to hurt the Russian economy, encouraging Russia to end the war. The sanctions were announced by Kaja Kallas, the Prime Minister of Estonia, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union, and a member

¹¹⁰ Clobes, Morwinsky, and Šimaitytė, *Baltic Bastions*.

¹¹¹ Nicholas Fiorenza, "Lithuania Orders More NASAMS and MSHORAD Air Defence Systems," *Janes*, October 8, 2024, www.janes.com/osint-insights/defence-news/weapons/lithuania-orders-more-nasams-and-mshorad-air-defence-systems.

¹¹² Yurii Stasiuk, "EU Lowers Russia Oil Cap and Imposes New Sanctions after Fico Drops Veto," *POLITICO*, July 18, 2025, www.politico.eu/article/eu-finally-approves-latest-russia-sanctions-package/.

¹¹³ Columbia CGEP, "How the Price Cap on Russian Oil Will Work in Practice - Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University SIPA | CGEP," Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University SIPA | CGEP, November 30, 2022, www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/publications/how-price-cap-russian-oil-will-work-practice/.



Russian central bank (Credit: Vyacheslav Argenberg)

of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. Because sanctions must be approved unanimously in the European Union, this package of sanctions was approved by all CBSS members.¹¹⁴ The sanctions were approved by the European Parliament on July 18, after a deal was reached with CBSS observer states Slovakia and Hungary to maintain existing exemptions on the purchase of Russian gas. They had previously been threatening to veto the sanctions. Hungary and Slovakia opposed the European Union's plan to completely phase

out Russian energy and gas imports by 2027.¹¹⁵ They state that this plan threatens their energy independence, and they cite the fact that they had previously been granted an exception to the ban on purchasing Russian oil.¹¹⁶

The July 2025 sanctions package was aimed at closing loopholes Russia had been using to bypass earlier restrictions. It banned financial transactions linked to the Nord Stream pipelines, which were majority-owned by Russia's state company Gazprom and once provided a steady income before

their sabotage in 2022.¹¹⁷ The new rules also targeted Russia's so-called shadow fleet of tankers sailing under foreign flags to secretly move oil. Finally, the package restricted imports of Russian crude that had been refined in third countries such as Turkey, China, and India before being sold back into Europe.¹¹⁸

The United States of America has been considering adding additional sanctions on Russia. This move has been backed by CBSS member states, who have been notably aggressive in their support for sanctions on Russia, given their proximity to the Russian border.¹¹⁹ In particular, Estonia has been a leading proponent of strict sanctions, even going so far as to threaten a veto of the eventually passed 18th sanction package if it did not include a cap on Russian oil prices.¹²⁰

The European Union's first sanctions against Russia came in February 2022, just two days before the invasion of Ukraine. One of the earliest and strongest targets was the banking sector. The measures restricted the Russian government and key officials from using EU-linked banks, and several major Russian banks were cut off from the Society for Worldwide International Financial

114 "How the EU Adopts and Reviews Sanctions," Consilium, 2019, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-adoption-review-procedure/.

115 "Roadmap to Fully End EU Dependency on Russian Energy," European Commission, May 6, 2025, commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/roadmap-fully-end-eu-dependency-russian-energy-2025-05-06_en.

116 Gabriel Gavin, "Hungary, Slovakia Stall Russian Sanctions over Gas Ban Proposal," POLITICO, June 23, 2025, www.politico.eu/article/hungary-slovakia-block-new-russia-energy-sanctions-ukraine-war-invasion-eu-viktor-orban/.

117 Stasiuk, "EU Lowers Russia Oil Cap," 2025

118 Gavin, "Hungary, Slovakia Stall Russian Sanctions," 2025

119 Kateryna Serohina, "RBC Ukraine," Msn.com, 2025, www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/latvia-urges-trump-not-to-delay-new-sanctions-against-russia/ar-AA1ILtq2?ocid=BingNewsSerp.

120 Volodymyr Ivanyshyn, "Estonia May Veto EU's 18th Sanctions Package If Russian Oil Price Cap Not Lowered, Foreign Minister Says," The Kyiv Independent, July 10, 2025, kyivindependent.com/estonia-may-veto-eus-18th-sanctions-package-if-russian-oil-price-cap-not-lowered-foreign-minister-says-06-2025/.

Telecommunication (SWIFT) system. SWIFT is the international messaging network used to process cross-border transactions. Losing access to SWIFT made it far harder for Russian banks to move money internationally, crippling a core part of their operations.¹²¹ The EU's February 2025 sanctions package also added bans on international transactions for 13 additional Russian banks. Sanctions were also placed on financial institutions that used the Financial Messaging System of the Central Bank of Russia (SPFS) to get around restrictions placed on SWIFT.¹²² This was meant to close a loophole in earlier sanctions.

Among the banks that have been sanctioned by the European Union is Gazprombank, a Russian state-owned bank that mainly handles transactions related to oil and gas. Gazprombank is linked to Gazprom, the Russian state-owned natural gas company that owns the majority share of the Nord Stream pipeline.¹²³ The United States has identified Gazprombank as a way for Russia to facilitate military transactions, in addition to handling oil and gas sales to Western Europe. Gazprombank

was the last major Russian bank to face sanctions by the United States in December of 2024. The move was opposed by CBSS member state Hungary, who requested that an exception be made allowing them to conduct business with Gazprombank to continue purchasing Russian natural gas.¹²⁴ This request was granted.

The European Union has limited Russia's economic and military activity with export and import bans. Export restrictions prevent Russia from accessing products that are necessary to produce weaponry and military technology.

European Union member states are banned from exporting these items to Russia.

Banned exports include iron and steel, aviation-related goods, computer chips, certain chemicals, plastics, and industrial robots.¹²⁵ Additionally, the EU has established import bans on Russian goods. These are meant to hurt Russia's most profitable industries by stopping sales to European Union member states. Examples

of products targeted by import restitutions include helium, non-industrial diamonds, and steel.¹²⁶

Sanctions have also targeted members of Russia's wealthy elite, particularly oligarchs and their families. The EU has placed export bans on luxury goods, such as cars and jewelry, that are frequently purchased by wealthy Russians.¹²⁷ Sanctions have also included travel bans for specific individuals. These figures include Kremlin advisors, business figures, and members of the media. They have found themselves unable to travel to certain EU countries, access frozen assets, or participate in financial transactions abroad.

As of February of 2025, over 2,500 Russian individuals have been sanctioned by the EU and the United States.¹²⁸ Sanctions against Russia have also sought to combat disinformation about the war in Ukraine. Bans and restrictions have been placed on radio stations and publications that express support for the Russian invasion. The EU's 16th round of sanctions, for example, placed a broadcasting suspension on eight news outlets that were engaging in "supporting and justifying Russia's war of aggression

121 Alessandro Rebutti, "SWIFT Sanction on Russia: How It Works and Likely Impacts | Econofact," econofact.org, March 4, 2022, econofact.org/swift-sanction-on-russia-how-it-works-and-likely-impacts.

122 "EU Adopts 16th Sanctions Package against Russia," Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood, February 24, 2025, enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-adopts-16th-sanctions-package-against-russia-2025-02-24_en.

123 Lauren Irwin, "Treasury Imposes Sanctions on Russian Banks, Financial Officials," The Hill, November 21, 2024, thehill.com/policy/international/5002275-treasury-imposes-sanctions-on-russian-banks-financial-officials/.

124 Dmytro Basmat, "Hungary Requests US Sanctions Exemption for Russian Natural Gas Payments," The Kyiv Independent, December 5, 2024, kyivindependent.com/hungary-requests-us-sanctions-exemption-for-russian-natural-gas-payments/.

125 "Import and Export Bans," European Commission, 2023, commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-sanctions-against-russia-following-invasion-ukraine/import-and-export-bans_en.

126 European Commission, "Import and Export Bans," 2023.

127 "Press Corner," European Commission - European Commission, March 14, 2022, ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1761.

128 Simeon Djankov, "Asymmetric Sanctions on Russian Individuals," CEPR, March 25, 2025, cepr.org/voxeu/columns/asymmetric-sanctions-russian-individuals.



Russian gas pipelines in Europe (Credit: Samuel Bailey)

against Ukraine.”¹²⁹ In May of 2024, four more outlets were added to the list, following allegations that

they were receiving payments from Russian sources. The EU alleges that the outlets were paid to publish

pro-Russia propaganda, leading up to elections across the continent.¹³⁰ Media outlets that have been sanctioned by the European Union are suspended from publishing, broadcasting, or circulating material within EU countries. This raises questions around freedom of the press in the EU. While the majority of sanctioned outlets are Russian-owned, such as Russia Today and Sputnik, others are based in EU countries, such as the Netherlands’ Voice of Europe.

While the July 2025 slate of sanctions is the most comprehensive set of restrictions on Russia in the past few months, the EU has already started to draft a 19th round of sanctions.¹³¹ These sanctions will finish closing loopholes, and further limit Russia’s oil and natural gas profits.

BLOC ANALYSIS

Points of Division

The crisis regarding Russia and the Baltic states has split the countries (and subsequent allies) into three main blocs: those who have been victims of direct hybrid attacks, those who strive for diplomatic relations and avoid military conflict, and states that still

rely on Russian energy.¹³² While the Baltic states are the main players in this conflict, many of the NATO Allies stand to face repercussions. Each respective bloc works towards the same goal of ensuring security for the Baltic states and Baltic Sea not only for the people of those countries but also due to the important geopolitical location of the states.

Germany and the EU as a whole were long dependent on Russian energy. Since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, both have worked to phase out this reliance. Germany has largely eliminated Russian pipeline gas, coal, and oil, but some EU countries still buy Russian pipeline gas, making the EU collectively one of the largest remaining buyers.¹³³ In February

¹²⁹ European Union, “EU Adopts 16th Sanctions Package against Russia,” February 24, 2025,

¹³⁰ “EU Bans 4 More Russian Media Outlets from Broadcasting in the Bloc, Citing Disinformation,” AP News, May 17, 2024, apnews.com/article/eu-russia-sanctions-media-ukraine-war-39f2ba861a5e1441aa24ec4c11f1d822.

¹³¹ Ukrainska Pravda, “EU Begins Work on New Sanctions Package against Russia – Estonian Foreign Ministry,” Yahoo News, July 19, 2025, www.yahoo.com/news/eu-begins-sanctions-package-against-062940705.html.

¹³² Margus Tsahkna, “Estonian Security Priorities in the Baltic Context” (Tallinn: Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025), 8-12.

¹³³ February 6, 2025, accessed July 20, 2025, www.npr.org/2025/02/06/g-s1-46775/baltic-nations-count-final-hours-to-ending-electricity-ties-to-russia.

of 2025, all three Baltic States were successfully transferred to the European Union's power grid. Due to the difference in timelines, many states are against comprehensive energy embargoes and instead support exemptions if the EU were to impose sanctions.

This issue would focus on balancing all the state's economic needs and their commitment to both NATO and the Baltic states.¹³⁴ To try and meet in the middle, many states of the Council of the Baltic Sea States have been pushing for more diplomatic relations in which open dialogue is encouraged. This is not one of the more popular ideas, especially with those who have recently been victims of Russian hybrid attacks. Despite the divide in methods, all states are pushing for a way to ensure security and defense for the Baltic states.

Diplomatic Approaches

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, many countries have been calling for immediate sanctions on Russian trade and energy. However, a few states are still pushing for diplomatic ways to rectify the situation. One of the most notable countries is the United States. With President Donald Trump's recent re-

election, the US has been pushing for diplomatic negotiations with Russia over continuing military aid to Ukraine. US Vice President JD Vance put it as the US has "issued a very explicit proposal to both the Russians and the Ukrainians," he said, "and it's time for them to either say yes or for the United States to walk away from this process."¹³⁵

During his first term (2016-2020), Trump's stance on Russia, while widely perceived as sympathetic, continued the long-standing domestic view of Russia as an aggressor. He even put sanctions on the state. However, with Trump's re-election (2025-2029), tensions between the US and Russia have risen, with Trump's demands for Ukraine war ceasefire negotiations, which were quickly shot down by Russia.

The US's inconsistent method of diplomacy with Russia has left allies concerned about their next move.¹³⁶ Nordic countries such as Norway and Finland have focused on mediation through methods such as impartiality, diplomacy, and humanitarian efforts. These methods have been increasingly difficult, as they are committed to NATO but cautious given their exposure. Due to Finland's

hundreds of years of history with Russia, as well as their 1,340 kilometers of shared border, direct actions other than sanctions are a lot more complicated than they may appear.¹³⁷ States like these have a lot to lose by engaging in direct conflict with Russia and will likely be the first to face the repercussions.

Energy Dependence

While many states have mostly or completely cut ties with Russian liquified gas, the European Union, a member state of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, remains the largest global purchaser of Russian liquified gas as of January 2025.¹³⁸ In the first year of the invasion, CBSS member states and observers Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and France continued to purchase Russian liquified gas, with Germany being the second largest global importer behind China.¹³⁹ 23 Russian oil and gas pipelines are located throughout Europe, and cross through a number of member and observer states, as well as underneath the Baltic Sea. Combined, the pipelines run for a combined 1,517 miles underwater between Russia and Germany.

¹³⁴ Lars Løkke Rasmussen, "Nordic-Baltic Security and Economic Interdependence" (Copenhagen: Danish Foreign Policy Institute, 2025), 12-14.

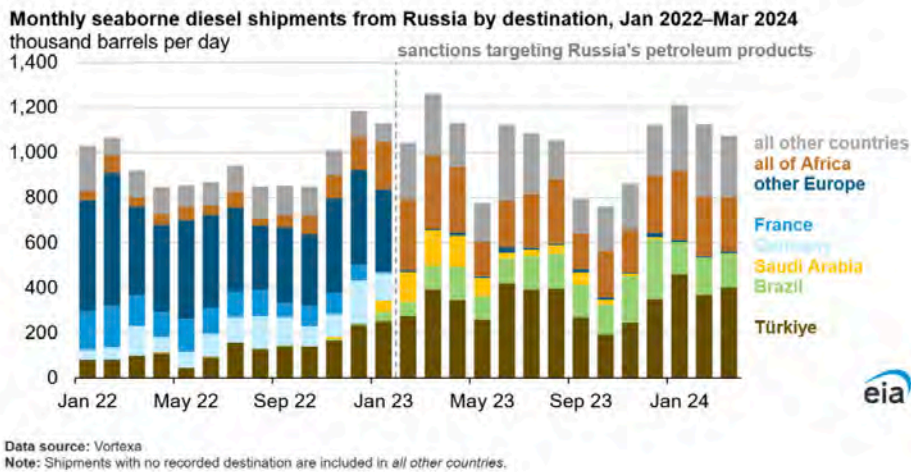
¹³⁵ Frank Figliuzzi, "Trump's Latest Outburst Should Alarm Zelenskyy — and All of Europe," *MSNBC*, June 17, 2024, www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/trump-ukraine-zelenskyy-russia-putin-war-rcna202724.

¹³⁶ Sophie Arts and Julian Dörr, "The End of NATO?" *Verfassungsblog*, March 18, 2024, verfassungsblog.de/the-end-of-nato/.

¹³⁷ "Finland's President Says Time to Be 'Hard' with Russia amid Threats to Europe," *PBS NewsHour*, February 15, 2024, www.pbs.org/newshour/show/finlands-president-says-time-to-be-hard-with-russia-amid-threats-to-europe.

¹³⁸ Vaibhav Raghunandan, "May 2025 — Monthly Analysis of Russian Fossil Fuel Exports and Sanctions – Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air," Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, June 13, 2025, energyandcleanair.org/may-2025-monthly-analysis-of-russian-fossil-fuel-exports-and-sanctions/.

¹³⁹ Niccolo Conte, "Which Countries Are Buying Russian Fossil Fuels?," *Visual Capitalist*, March 2, 2023, www.visualcapitalist.com/which-countries-are-buying-russian-fossil-fuels/.



Oil shipments by Russia to the rest of the world 2022-2024 (Credit: U.S. Energy Information Administration)

In light of cable attacks and the broader security threat that a dependence on a Russian export for something as important as gas poses, several Baltic states, including Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, have stopped purchasing Russian natural gas and have instead been turning to other countries, such as Norway, to supply natural gas.¹⁴⁰ Multiple member states of the European Union have, however, continued to purchase Russian gas. These states, including Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Austria, and the Czech Republic, are not situated

on the Baltic Sea and therefore do not face the same security threats and economic leveraging that many CBSS do. While these states may not be able to directly influence the Council of the Baltic Sea States, they can influence the European Union, which has member status in the CBSS.

The states that continue to purchase Russian oil and gas may be doing so for a number of reasons. These reasons may include the cost and logistics of cutting off Russian imports, the cost of Russian gas compared to other options, and

public opposition. While these states have expressed concern over the political capital that these pipelines give Russia, and in some cases have limited or moved to limit imports, the natural gas that Russia provides continues to be a necessary and difficult-to-replace resource.

Hybrid and Infrastructure Attacks

Although Ukraine has been the recipient of the vast majority of Russian attacks, other Baltic states have also suffered the tangible effects of Russian aggression. In 2024, the Estlink 2 power cable, an underwater communications cable linking Estonia and Finland, was damaged in what was determined to likely be an act of sabotage by Russia.¹⁴¹ Suspicion has fallen on Russia and ships associated with the shadow fleet. In December of 2024 and February of 2025, a number of these ships were the source of explosions at ports around Europe, specifically in Spain and Italy, who are both CBSS observer states.¹⁴² The targeted ships had recently been to Russian ports, possibly to pick up smuggled shipments of crude oil, and were later damaged by explosive devices when docking elsewhere.¹⁴³ In October of 2023,

140 Lorne Cook and Sam McNeil, "The EU Seeks to Halt Russian Gas Imports by the End of 2027 and Ban New Contracts Already This Year," AP News, May 6, 2025, apnews.com/article/europe-russia-gas-contracts-2027-hungary-slovakia-64a06c9062832f92047cb736b896f78.

141 MI News Network, "Russian Tanker Detained for Dragging Anchor & Damaging Power Cable Connecting Finland & Estonia," Marine Insight, December 30, 2024, www.marineinsight.com/shipping-news/russian-tanker-detained-for-dragging-anchor-damaging-power-cable-connecting-finland-estonia/.

142 Reuters, "Suspicious Blasts Damage Three Russia-Linked Tankers in the Mediterranean over the Last Month," Baird Maritime / Work Boat World, February 19, 2025, www.bairdmaritime.com/security/incidents/suspicious-blasts-damage-three-russia-linked-tankers-in-the-mediterranean-over-the-last-month.

143 Reuters Staff, "Three Tankers Damaged by Blasts in Mediterranean in the Last Month, Causes Unknown, Sources Say," Reuters, February 19, 2025, www.reuters.com/business/energy/three-tankers-damaged-by-blasts-mediterranean-last-month-causes-unknown-sources-2025-02-19/.

Balticconnector, a gas pipeline between Estonia and Finland that is also linked to Latvia and Lithuania and intersects Nord Stream, and EE-S1, a communications pipeline between Estonia and Sweden, were cut in what Finnish and Estonian officials alleged to be an intentional act of sabotage.¹⁴⁴

These attacks call into question the security of shipping lanes and communication channels between Baltic states and come

at a great cost to the states that suffer the attacks. Repairs to the Balticconnector pipeline, for example, cost an estimated USD 40,687,500 to repair, following the attack in October of 2023.¹⁴⁵ The posts in Italy and Spain, the location of the ship explosions, now face concerns over additional attacks. This is especially true given the unprecedented nature of ship civilian sabotage in the Mediterranean region. Because the ships that exploded were

frequently traveling through the Baltic Sea and the Baltic Sea region, explosives on board may cause real security concerns for member states, in addition to disrupting communication lines and gas shipments.

Affected states have a particular interest in addressing the issue of the Russian Shadow Fleet, reinforcing undersea cables and pipelines, and continuing investigations into previous attacks.

COMMITTEE MISSION

The Council of the Baltic Sea States exists to facilitate cooperation between the states that border the Baltic Sea and their allies. This is done through the three key principles of regional identity, safety and security, and a sustainable and prosperous region. To achieve the organization's vision for a peaceful and unified Baltic Sea region, the Council of the Baltic Sea States is responsible for the creation of organizations and forums meant to address these focus areas. The principle of regional identity promotes education and culture that can be shared across the region. The principle of a Sustainable and Prosperous Region emphasizes sustainable development, climate action, and scientific research and development. Finally, the principle of a Safe and Secure Region seeks to

promote civil protections, especially for children, combat human trafficking, and maintain human rights and international law. This is the principle most concerned with addressing the effects of the Russian-Ukraine war as they relate to the Baltic Sea Region.

The Council's three primary priorities are meant to work together with one another through an intersectional approach to bettering the Baltic Sea region. For example, the role of Baltic youths is emphasized in the Regional Identity principle's commitment to cultural education, the Sustainable and Prosperous Region principle's commitment to climate education and sustainable development for future generations, and the Safe

and Secure Region principle's goal of addressing children of human trafficking.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States works to achieve its goals by cooperating with other international organizations. These organizations include the United Nations, the European Union, a member of the council, and the North American Treaty Organization. Because the CBSS is committed to addressing issues that affect the entire region in a cooperative way, many of the projects established by the Council of the Baltic Sea States were developed with other organizations. For example, the CBSS's Baltic 2030 Climate Action Plan was designed to align with the United Nations's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Additionally, the 2030 agenda was written in

¹⁴⁴ Kathryn Armstrong, "Finland Investigates Suspected Sabotage of Baltic-Connector Gas Pipeline," *BBC*, October 10, 2023, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67070389.

¹⁴⁵ Huko Aaspõllu, "€35 Million Balticconnector Gas Pipeline Repair Work Finished," *ERR (Eesti Rahvusringhääling)*, April 22, 2024, news.err.ee/1609320474/35-million-balticconnector-gas-pipeline-repair-work-finished.

collaboration with the European Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region office.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States is organized to encourage cooperation with the governments

of member states to achieve the Council's goals. Foreign ministers serve as the representatives of member states to the CBSS, and senior diplomats with relevant experience serve on the Committee

of Senior Officials.¹⁴⁶ This allows for the kind of healthy dialogue and productive relationships between member states that the CBSS seeks to promote.

COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Please note that in committee, any directive needs a simple majority to pass, but it also must be a majority of the full members, not just the observers. All characters listed here are full voting members, unless otherwise specified.

Lars Løkke Rasmussen: Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs

Lars Løkke Rasmussen was appointed as the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs in December of 2022.¹⁴⁷ He is a seasoned politician with over three decades of being a part of the Danish Parliament. In 2009-2011, he served as prime minister of Denmark.¹⁴⁸ He oversees Denmark's diplomacy, international

security, and international relations. Within the committee, he would have a pro-European stance and likely work with other Nordic states and the Baltic states to help strengthen the region.

Tõnis Nirk: Estonian Ambassador-at- Large for Baltic Sea Cooperation

Tõnis Nirk currently serves as the Ambassador at Large for Baltic Sea affairs. He oversees the CBSS' senior officials, focusing on policy mainly regarding energy, environment, and maritime security. He shows strong support for Ukraine as well as concern for

hybrid threats from Russia. Nirk emphasizes the need for a regional identity and believes it is crucial for a secure region.¹⁴⁹

Margus Tsahkna: Estonia Minister of Foreign Affairs

Margus Tsahkna was appointed the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs in April 2023. He has a history in both defense and social security.¹⁵⁰ Early in his career, he greatly contributed to the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union. He is a strong proponent of Estonian independence and strengthening ties to NATO and the EU. Tsahkna is responsible for all foreign affairs except foreign trade.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ "Our Structure," Council of the Baltic Sea States, Accessed July 27, 2025, cbss.org/about-us/structure/

¹⁴⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, "Minister for Foreign Affairs," [um.dk](https://um.dk/en/about-us/the-ministers/minister-for-foreign-affairs), accessed August 11, 2025, um.dk/en/about-us/the-ministers/minister-for-foreign-affairs.

¹⁴⁸ World Economic Forum, "Lars Løkke Rasmussen," World Economic Forum, accessed August 11, 2025, www.weforum.org/people/lars-lokke-rasmussen/.

¹⁴⁹ Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, "Cooperation – The Link to the Future," BSPC.net, accessed August 11, 2025, www.bspc.net/news/cooperation-the-link-to-the-future.

¹⁵⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, "Foreign Minister," vm.ee, accessed August 11, 2025, vm.ee/en/ministry-news-and-contacts/about-ministry-foreign-affairs/foreign-minister.

¹⁵¹ Government of Estonia, "Minister of Foreign Affairs Margus Tsahkna," valitsus.ee, accessed August 11, 2025, valitsus.ee/en/prime-minister-ministers/minister-foreign-affairs-margus-tсахkna.

Kaja Kallas: High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Kaja Kallas is the former Prime Minister of Estonia. After leaving office in 2024, she took on the joint positions of High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security, and Vice-President of the European Commission. Kallas has a background in law, and has served in Estonia's parliament. Kallas supports European aid to Ukraine. She has been critical of China's support for Russia in the past.¹⁵²

Helena Tuuri: Finnish Ambassador for Baltic Sea Affairs

Helena Tuuri has served as the Finnish Ambassador to Prague since August of 2014. In 2023, she assumed the role of president of the Council of the Baltic Sea States through 2024. Since then, Tuuri has been the Finnish Ambassador for Baltic Sea Affairs. She has been working towards securing EU

funding as well as working towards major changes in migration and climate change. Tuuri would likely be a proponent of safeguarding critical underwater infrastructure with the goal of protecting the EU energy grid and marine life.¹⁵³

Elina Valtonen: Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs

Elina Valtonen serves as the current Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland. Aside from this, she has a background in defense and finance, having served on both the Finnish defense and finance committees. Before entering politics, she worked over a decade in the financial sector and as a former computer programmer.¹⁵⁴ She shows strong support for Ukraine and the strengthening of CBSS international relationships.¹⁵⁵

Johann Wadephul: German Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

Johann Wadephul began his service as the German Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs in May 2025. He stands strong in his support for Ukraine and EU unity. In multiple interviews he has stated his acknowledgement that Russia has shown aggression towards Ukraine.¹⁵⁶ Wadephul would likely support the continuation of NATO and EU aid towards the Baltic Sea States. He supports the need for an increase of military presence in the region to protect the people of the Baltic States. He recognizes the importance of the Baltic Sea as a key region for the protection of Europe.¹⁵⁷

Þorgerður (Thorgerdur) Katrín Gunnarsdóttir: Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs

Þorgerður (Thorgerdur) Katrín Gunnarsdóttir began her service as Icelandic Minister of Foreign Affairs in December 2024. For

¹⁵² Kallas attacks Beijing: "China a key enabler in Russia's war against Ukraine," EUnews, February 17, 2025, <https://www.eunews.it/en/2025/02/17/kallas-attacks-beijing-china-a-key-enabler-in-russias-war-against-ukraine/>

¹⁵³ University of Turku, "On the Baltic Sea and the Oceans," Baltic Rim Economies (BRE), accessed August 11, 2025, sites.utu.fi/bre/on-the-baltic-sea-and-the-oceans/.

¹⁵⁴ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "Chairperson-in-Office," OSCE, accessed August 11, 2025, www.osce.org/chairmanship/chairperson-in-office.

¹⁵⁵ Prime Minister's Office of Finland, "Minister for Foreign Affairs Elina Valtonen to Meet with Her Ukrainian Counterpart Andrii Sybiha," [valtioneuvosto.fi](https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/minister-for-foreign-affairs-elina-valtonen-to-meet-with-her-ukrainian-counterpart-andrii-sybiha), accessed August 11, 2025, valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/minister-for-foreign-affairs-elina-valtonen-to-meet-with-her-ukrainian-counterpart-andrii-sybiha.

¹⁵⁶ Federal Foreign Office (Germany), "Interview with Federal Foreign Minister Wadephul in Bild am Sonntag," Federal Foreign Office, published July 20, 2025, accessed August 11, 2025, www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/interview-wadephul-bams-2728458.

¹⁵⁷ Federal Foreign Office (Germany), "Speech by Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul at the Kiel Security Conference," Federal Foreign Office, June 20, 2025, accessed August 11, 2025, www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/2723536-2723536.

the last two decades, she has been a key figure in Icelandic politics. Gunnarsdóttir has had a long career in foreign relations, starting in 2009 as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee until her current position as the foreign affairs minister.¹⁵⁸ As a founding member of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, Gunnarsdóttir works closely with the EU, NATO, and the Baltic States to strengthen and secure the region.¹⁵⁹

Baiba Braže: Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs

Baiba Braže has served as the Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs since 2024. She has previously held foreign affairs positions such as the Ambassador of Latvia to the United Kingdom. In previous speeches, she has emphasized the need for sanctions on Russia, such as barring exports and transports of manganese ore as well as the transshipment of oil and gas from Russia to EU ports. Braže has also been working towards securing Latvia's candidacy for membership on the UN Security Council.¹⁶⁰

Kęstutis Budrys: Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs

Kęstutis Budrys has over 20 years of experience in national security. In 2009, he began his political journey as an advisor to the President of Latvia on defense, policy, and intelligence. Since then, Budrys has served a number of roles, including Chief National Security Advisor, Secretary of the State Defense Council and Chairman of the Intelligence Coordination Group. He began his service as the Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs in December 2024. Since then, he has openly recognized Russia's shadow fleet, unclear maritime law, and the increase in Russian activity within the Baltic Sea. Budrys' main objectives would be to clearly define international maritime law and work towards the defense and offense of the Baltic Sea States.¹⁶¹

Espen Barth Eide: Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs

Espen Barth Eide was appointed as the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs in October 2023. He was originally a researcher on international affairs and since then has been working on defense and foreign affairs for his state. Having served as both a spokesperson on energy in the Norwegian parliament and Minister of Climate and Environment, he is very dedicated to the health of the planet and policies dedicated to that.¹⁶² He has focused on the need for protecting and securing undersea infrastructure such as cables and pipelines.¹⁶³

Aud Lise Norheim: Norwegian Senior Advisor of the Section for Nordic-Baltic Affairs

The position of Norwegian Senior Advisor of the Section for Nordic-Baltic Affairs emphasizes cooperation with a number of different international organizations. These organizations include the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the European Union,

¹⁵⁸ Alþingi (Iceland's Parliament), "Þorgerður K. Gunnarsdóttir," Alþingi, accessed August 11, 2025, www.althingi.is/altext/cv/en/?nfaerslunr=78.

¹⁵⁹ Government of Iceland, "Presidents and Foreign Ministers of the Baltic States Visit Iceland," Government of Iceland, August 26, 2022, accessed August 11, 2025, www.government.is/news/article/2022/08/26/Presidents-and-Foreign-Ministers-of-the-Baltic-States-visit-Iceland/.

¹⁶⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, "The First Year of Foreign Minister Baiba Braže in PM Evika Siliņa's Team," Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Latvia), accessed August 11, 2025, www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/first-year-foreign-minister-baiba-braze-pm-evika-silinas-team.

¹⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, "Budrys: The Baltic Sea Cannot Become the Shadow Fleet's 'Playground,'" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (news release), May 20, 2025, accessed August 11, 2025, www.urm.lt/en/news/928/budrys-the-baltic-sea-cannot-become-the-shadow-fleets-playground:44169.

¹⁶² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, "Espen Barth Eide," World Economic Forum, accessed August 11, 2025, www.weforum.org/people/espen-barth-eide/.

¹⁶³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Norway), "Will Ensure a Safer Seabed," Government of Norway, January 16, 2025, accessed August 11, 2025, www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/will-ensure-a-safer-seabed/id3083648/.

and NATO. As Norway is not only a Baltic state, but a Scandinavian and Nordic state as well, this position involves balancing the needs and interests of both regions. Aud Lise Norheim serves on the Council of the Baltic Sea States' Committee of Senior Officials.

Katarzyna Barcikowska, Polish Head of the Baltic Multilateral Unit, European Policy Department

Katarzyna Barcikowska's position emphasizes regional cooperation. The head of the Baltic Multilateral Unit is tasked with not only serving on the Council of the Baltic Sea States Committee of Senior Officials, but also cooperating with other regional governments and the European Union. The position has an emphasis on democracy, human rights issues, and national security.

Radosław Sikorski: Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs

Radosław Sikorski has been the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs since 2023, although he also held the position for seven years previously, until 2014. Sikorski has a background in journalism, reporting from war zones around

the world. Sikorski also served as the Minister of National Defence from 2005 to 2007. On the issue of the Russia-Ukraine War, Sikorski has pushed for a ceasefire. He has also supported the resettling of Ukrainian refugees in Poland and is a loud critic of Russia and advocates increased support for Ukraine.¹⁶⁴

Maria Malmer Stenergard: Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs

Maria Malmer Stenergard has served as the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs since September 2024. In addition to her role as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Stenergard also serves in Sweden's parliament, which is typical under a parliamentary system. Before her current position, Stenergard served as the Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy from 2022 to 2024. Stenergard supports military aid to Ukraine.¹⁶⁵ She is known for her close cooperation with the United Nations, especially in humanitarian matters.

Jean-Noël Barrot: French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs (Observer)

Jean-Noël Barrot has served as the French Minister for Foreign Affairs since 2024. A veteran politician, Barrot has held high-level positions under a number of different prime ministers. He has served his current role under two prime ministers, and was previously the Minister Delegate for Digital Transition and Telecommunications. He is an expert in economics, and has previously served as an economics professor in the United States. He is a strong supporter of Ukraine, and has urged President Putin to negotiate an end to the war.¹⁶⁶

Antonio Tajani: Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs (Observer)

Antonio Tajani has served as Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs since 2022. He is also currently serving as the Deputy Prime Minister of Italy. This position gives Tajani the role of serving as prime minister if the acting prime minister cannot perform her duties. He shares the role. Tajani is known for his strong connections to the European Union, having served as President of the European Parliament and a European

¹⁶⁴ Polskie Radio, "Sikorski on MSNBC: Putin's Strategy to Escalate the Refugee Crisis This Winter," [date if known], <https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/7785/Artykul/3449843,sikorski-on-msnbc-putins-strategy-to-escalate-the-refugee-crisis-this-winter>

¹⁶⁵ United Nations Regional Information Centre (UNRIC), "Sweden Promises Support for Ukraine 'as Long as It Takes,'" accessed September 22, 2025, <https://unric.org/en/sweden-promises-support-for-ukraine-as-long-as-it-takes/>

¹⁶⁶ French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, "Jean-Noël Barrot: Biography," Diplomatie, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/our-ministers/jean-noel-barrot/biography/>.

Commissioner. Tajani supports the involvement of the European Union and NATO in negotiating an end to the Ukraine War.¹⁶⁷

Oana-Silvia Țoiu: Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs (Observer)

Oana-Silvia Țoiu has served as the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs since June of 2025. Like her predecessor, Țoiu has a background in journalism. Țoiu also has a background in labor policy, serving on the labor committee in Romania's parliament. Țoiu recently negotiated a deal with Ukraine to build a bridge between their states.

José Manuel Albares: Spain's Foreign Minister (Observer)

Albares has been serving as Spain's foreign minister since 2021. He is a member of Parliament as well, having been elected in 2023.¹⁶⁸ Albares has a background in law, and was previously Spain's ambassador to France. He is a strong supporter of Ukraine, and has visited the country to advocate for humanitarian aid. He has expressed support for increasing troop deployments to Ukraine sometime in the future,

although not immediately, and has encouraged Ukraine and Russia to negotiate a peace plan first.

Andrii Sybiha: Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs (Observer)

Andrii Sybiha is a Ukrainian legal scholar and diplomat who took office as Minister of Foreign Affairs in September of 2024. Sybiha's appointment to the office took place after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy chose to shuffle his cabinet, appointing several new officials to high-level positions. Sybiha is a vocal advocate for Ukraine joining the European Union. He has diplomatic ties to Turkey and Poland through his positions as a diplomatic envoy and ambassador.¹⁶⁹

Marco Rubio: US Secretary of State (Observer)

Marco Rubio has served as the Secretary of State of the United States of America since 2025. He is also the acting National Security Advisor. Rubio was previously a senator from the state of Florida, serving on the Senate committees for foreign relations and intelligence. During the first

administration of President Trump, Rubio often took on diplomatic roles in Latin American policy.¹⁷⁰ He has a background in law.

¹⁶⁷ Antonio Tajani, "Biography," The President, European Parliament, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/former_ep_presidents/president-tajani/en/the-presidency/biography.html

¹⁶⁸ Reuters, "Too early to discuss troop deployment to Ukraine, says Spain," February 17, 2025, www.reuters.com/world/europe/european-leaders-look-prevent-rewarding-russian-aggression-spain-says-2025-02-17/.

¹⁶⁹ Kateryna Denisova, "Who Is Andrii Sybiha, Ukraine's New Foreign Minister?" Kyiv Independent, September 5, 2024, <https://kyivindependent.com/who-is-andrii-sybiha-ukraines-new-foreign-minister/>

¹⁷⁰ Tampa Bay Times, "Rubio, Trump Foreign Policy: Venezuela, Immigration, Deportations," March 25, 2025, www.tampabay.com/news/florida-politics/2025/03/25/rubio-trump-foreign-policy-venezuela-immigration-deportations/

RESEARCH AND PREPARATION QUESTIONS

The following research and preparation questions are meant to help you begin your research on your country's policy. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

Topic A

1. How can the CBSS support member states in holding flag states accountable for environmental and infrastructure violations while also promoting transparency and information-sharing to counter hybrid maritime threats?
2. How can the CBSS work to increase awareness and further engage civil society in the implementation of the SDGs?
3. How have cyberattacks historically targeted the Baltic States, and in what ways do Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia differ in their approaches to cyber defense?
4. Should the Baltic States pursue energy independence through public or private initiatives, given their reliance on Russian imports and limited domestic resources?
5. Does NATO's presence reduce the risk of Russian aggression in the Baltics, or does it heighten escalation risks, and what role should the United States play compared to European NATO members?

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Topic A

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