



**3 September 2015**

**Statement by Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden on regional security**

The Nordic and Baltic Ministers for Foreign Affairs convened today in Copenhagen and exchanged views concerning the security situation in the Nordic and Baltic region. Russian aggression in Ukraine and its behaviour in the region more broadly, including military build-up, pose a challenge to European security, also in the Nordic and Baltic region. The Nordic and Baltic countries face these challenges with mutual solidarity and co-operation. Co-operation enhances our security and contributes to preventing security incidents. We also regularly discuss these issues in a number of other fora involving allies and partners.

The Foreign Ministers discussed the abduction, subsequent illegal detention and verdict against the Estonian police officer Eston Kohver at the Pskov Oblast regional court on 19 August. The conviction carries a sentence of 15 years imprisonment. Mr Kohver's abduction and subsequent illegal detention in Russia constitute a clear violation of international law. Despite repeated requests, the Russian authorities have failed to resolve the issue. The NB8 Ministers for Foreign Affairs condemn this and call on the Russian Federation to act according to its international obligations, release Mr Kohver immediately and guarantee his safe return to Estonia. Ministers will continue to follow this matter closely.

The Ministers discussed the broader problem of legal processes and sentencing in Russia in clear violation of international law, most recently the sentencing of Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov and his co-defendant Oleksandr Kolchenko. The Ministers call on Russia to immediately release Mr Sentsov and Mr Kolchenko and guarantee their safe return to Ukraine. The NB8 Ministers agreed on the importance of closely monitoring the on-going trial against the Ukrainian pilot and Member of Parliament, Nadiya Savchenko, and likewise to demand a legal and fair trial.

Ministers discussed the situation in Ukraine, and the need to step up support to Ukrainian reforms and economy. The Ukrainian reform process is of strategic importance to Ukraine, to the broader region and to the EU. Ministers also discussed the continued destabilizing role of Russia in Eastern Ukraine. Full implementation by all sides of the Minsk agreements respecting Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, based on democratic principles, remain of utmost

importance. Ministers also emphasized their support for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) and the importance of the mission's unhindered ability to carry out its mandate. Ministers expressed deep concern over the recent increase in violence and harassment of the OSCE SMM. Ministers urge all sides to fully observe the ceasefire agreement and ensure the safety and freedom of movement of SMM monitors and other international agencies in accordance with their mandate. Furthermore, Ministers confirmed their commitment to explore opportunities for further support also to other countries within the EU's Eastern Partnership.

The Ministers believe that continued exchange of information and ensuring best practices can lead to increased security and trust in the region, including in the area of air safety.

The Ministers reaffirmed the continued NB8 commitment to strategic communication and support to independent media and stressed the need to maintain momentum in addressing the challenge posed by the continuous disinformation by Russian media, inter alia in relation to the crisis in Ukraine.

Countering the aggressive disinformation and propaganda with support to capacity-building in free and independent media must remain a key priority. Joint proactive communication to Russian and non-Russian speaking EU target audiences is important. The NB8 Ministers welcomed the launch of EU's Action Plan on Strategic Communication and EED's feasibility report, which in combination with the ongoing review of the EU Neighbourhood policy and European Security Strategy as well as the follow-up on the Eastern Partnership summit in Riga provide a solid basis for the implementation, coordination and initiation of joint initiatives.

Ministers called for public service actors and private initiatives in all NB8 States to share their know-how and join hands to ensure a pluralistic media landscape, for example by creating independent journalistic or media centres of excellence. Ministers called for enhanced cooperation between EU and NATO on strategic communication. Ministers positively noted the recent opening of the NATO-accredited Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence. The discussions in the OSCE were welcomed and encouraged. Ministers also noted the positive role of the Nordic Council of Ministers, including through its local offices in the Baltic States, in contributing to the strengthening of independent and balanced Russian-language media and the enhancement of media literacy. Ministers encouraged further efforts in this regard in all relevant fora.