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ECR Group **Baltic Sea Declaration**







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The countries that surround the Baltic Sea face several common challenges where joint action will help to yield positive results for environmental protection, energy and transport interconnection as well as the wider security of the region.

We, Members of the ECR Group, therefore call for further coordinated efforts to meet these challenges:

▶ EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

We reaffirm our support for the integration projects that connect businesses, people and energy markets, protect the environment and assist the fight against cross-border crime as part of the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

▶ Environmental sustainability

We believe that there is an urgent need to improve the environmental sustainability of the Baltic Sea, given that its unique eco-system is particularly vulnerable to increasing sea temperatures, certain invasive alien species and pollution. In 2018, for example, a number of beaches were forced to close following a massive build-up of algae in the sea, triggered by the heat wave that spread across Europe causing record sea temperatures. Coupled with environmental degradation and deteriorating fish stocks there are serious concerns for the future viability of the fisheries industry, which is a crucial source of income for many communities along the Baltic coast.

▶ Fisheries

We call for additional targeted support for Baltic fisheries, particularly those that are small-scale, which must include improvements to both harbour and landing infrastructure, distribution and processing. We believe support is also needed to help reduce pressure on the environment with more sustainable fishing equipment, as well as a strategy to deal with pollution and marine litter in order to improve the overall ecosystem in the long term.

▶ Dumped munitions

We are deeply concerned about the risk still posed today by the over 50 000 tonnes of munitions, dumped on the Baltic seabed after World War II, that contain toxic substances such as mustard gas and continue to represent a serious hazard. Progress is therefore needed to map the dumped munitions in order to either remove them or reduce the risk they pose to the marine environment, health and undersea infrastructure projects, such as gas pipelines.

▶ Nord Stream 2

We are firmly opposed to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline which undermines efforts to diversify energy suppliers and whose construction is being carried out with complete disregard for the concerns of the other EU Member States in the Baltic Sea area.

▶ Russia

We share serious concerns over Russia's strengthened military capabilities and activities in the Baltic Sea region, including in the Kaliningrad exclave where nuclear weapons storage facilities have recently been modernised and Iskander missiles deployed, along with the continuing development of Anti-Access / Area-Denial capabilities.

We condemn Russia's recurring pattern of violating the territorial waters of European countries' and the blocking of maritime transport, as exemplified in the Vistula Lagoon, is wholly unacceptable, as are attempts at GPS jamming against NATO during its recent exercises. We therefore continue to support NATO's efforts to increase security in the region and their work with non-member partners. We therefore welcome the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), and also NATO's ongoing Air Policing Mission to safeguard Baltic airspace.

We are alarmed by the threat to essential systems & data posed by cyber attacks and we deplore the use by Russia of online media platforms to interfere in elections and spread covert hostile propaganda. It is essential that cyber security is given the highest priority.