

Madam Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, Ministers, your excellencies, dear youth

It is my pleasure as current chair of the Nordic-Baltic 8 group in Ukraine to deliver this statement on behalf of Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.

I am pleased to convey warm greetings from your Northern friends. Rest assured that Ukraine is not alone. The Nordic Baltic nations are with you - also at this challenging moment.

I am also pleased to greet this great audience of young people from across the nation and from all walks of life - both civilian and military. Young people are mobile. Many of you could move to Western Europe if you wanted to. Warsaw, Berlin or Copenhagen are just around the corner. But you have chosen to stay and to be part of Ukraine's resilience and dynamic transformation. That is crucially important: Because you are the future of Ukraine.

We were delighted with the opportunity to participate and give a statement in support of this crucial agenda. Indeed, youth are often the driving force in our own societies and we believe young people to be invaluable leaders of today as well as of tomorrow.

We as the NB8 continue to be fully engaged in our support to Ukraine in its fight against Russia's full-scale invasion. Ukraine's fight for a just peace is a fight for peace for the whole of Europe and we must work together to uphold European principles of sovereignty, democracy, and freedom. To this end, the youth of Ukraine, a vital component of the nation's human capital, is essential for its resilience and post-war reconstruction.

However, youth is affected in the most profound ways by the war. Young men and women are fighting at the frontlines. Let me take this opportunity to salute all Ukrainian defenders. You not only defending Ukraine's freedom, but also our freedom.

Young people are among the millions of refugees and internally displaced, whereas others remain in their homes to this day – also in frontline communities. Whatever their situation the possibilities for a life of dignity have been tragically curtailed. That is why we and so many of Ukraine's partners and friends work to support a better future for Ukrainian youth through support to emergency relief, resilience, recovery and reconstruction.

The NB8 rank among the top contributors to these efforts in GDP terms, supporting both military and civilian efforts. We recognise that more hopeful conditions for Ukrainians, not least youth, to develop and grow will be key to sustainable development. It will be crucial to Ukraine's path towards EU accession, which we support – politically, economically and socially – and important elements on this path are:

1. Strengthened social cohesion to foster national unity and resilience through active youth participation in civic life.
2. Promotion of economic opportunities and self-realization to equip young people with skills and resources for a life of dignity.
3. Support to psychological and emotional well-being, alongside secure environments, to help youth surpass the challenges caused by the Russian aggressor.

In these and many other areas, the NB8 stand united in our support to Ukraine. Through collaborative efforts, our partnership leverages shared expertise and resources to empower Ukraine and its young people. That is how we will help cultivate a generation equipped to lead the nation's recovery and advance its integration into the European community.

Let me conclude by quoting the statement that was issued on Sunday by the leaders of the Nordic-Baltic countries:

*"We stand firm in our unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity in the face of Russia's illegal war of aggression.*

*The people of Ukraine must have the freedom to decide their future. The path to peace cannot be charted without Ukraine's voice. No decisions on Ukraine without Ukraine, and no decisions on Europe without Europe"*

Our best wishes for this Ukrainian Youth Forum – we look forward to following and supporting your work.