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From:	Lithuania
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Joint statement agreed at the Regional Civil Protection Forum held in Vilnius on 6 September 2024

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Delegations will find in annex the joint statement agreed by DK, EE, FI, IS, LV, LT, NO, PL, SE and UA at the Regional Civil Protection Forum held in Vilnius on 6 September 2024.

## **REGIONAL CIVIL PROTECTION FORUM**

**6 September 2024, Lithuania**

### **Joint Statement**

We, the Ministers and High-Level Representatives in charge of civil protection of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Ukraine, gathered in a Regional Civil Protection Forum in Vilnius on 6 September 2024, to assess the current situation and common challenges in the field of civil protection and discuss possible ways forward.

The threat landscape in Europe has become increasingly complex, with a growing number of risks posed by external actors. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has been ongoing for over 30 months. Additionally, Russia and Belarus continue orchestrating hybrid attacks targeting the EU Member States and other neighbouring countries. Instrumentalisation of irregular migration, malicious cyber activities, disinformation campaigns, arsons and acts of sabotage, are aimed to destabilize our States, weaken the public trust in government institutions and intimidate the population.

In the current geopolitical context, civil protection has a key role to play. Regardless of the origin of the threat, our mission is clear – to protect the civilian population, safeguard property and environment. For a long time, civil protection has been focused mostly on peace time emergencies. However, our current civil protection systems need to also take into account a new reality and be prepared to sustain and protect the population also in case of a military aggression or a hybrid scenario. In addition to civil protection, civil defence considerations have risen to the top of the agenda.

We underline the importance of an enhanced and coordinated European crisis preparedness as well as a Union preparedness strategy encompassing an all-hazards and whole-of-society approach that should also be reflected in the upcoming discussions on how to mobilise funding for civil protection.

We firmly believe that in order to address the current threats, further steps need to be taken both at national and the European levels. While recognizing civil protection as a national responsibility, and the European Union's supporting and complementary role, we underline the importance of common and coordinated actions of the States in our region and learning from each other, especially from Ukraine's experiences in facing Russia's ruthless attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Furthermore, civil-military cooperation is increasingly topical in a civil protection and crisis management context due to the fast-evolving threat and risk landscape. Therefore, it is crucial to further strengthen the complementarity and cooperation between the EU and NATO and foster synergies between civil and military spheres



both on the EU and national level. Lessons learned from Ukraine will also provide valuable insights in this field.

Risk identification and early warning improve the ability to mitigate the consequences of the crises. Therefore, we encourage the European Commission and the Council of the EU to work towards an EU level risk assessment that would enable Member and Participating States of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism to form a shared understanding of the threat landscape and adjust civil protection measures in an informed manner.

We reiterate our commitment to the implementation of the European Disaster Resilience Goals, including the Goals "Prepare" and "Respond", which aim to increase the risk awareness and preparedness of the population and enhance the Union Civil Protection response capacity. In this regard, we welcome the ongoing work at the EU level through "prepareEU" and "rescEU" and encourage the European Commission and the Council to further develop and operationalise the implementation of the goals by proposing concrete tools to improve the resilience of the EU.

Achieving progress in civil protection necessitates a commitment to continuously ensure the necessary investments at all levels. In many of our countries, national funding for civil protection and civil defence has increased significantly in recent years, and it could be necessary to further increase it in the coming years. With this in mind, we stress the importance of a sound use of the available financing for civil protection. The EU financial support could be beneficial for civil protection measures in Member and Participating States of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, including for the enhancement of response capacities including rescEU, public warning systems, the promotion of awareness, the development of shelters, the support of preparedness actions for cross-border mass evacuation, and other initiatives.

We attach particular importance to national and regional level preparedness for mass evacuation with cross-border dimension ensuring universal human rights and protection standards during evacuations. This includes ensuring safety, dignity, and well-being of all evacuees, with special attention to vulnerable groups such as children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. Therefore, we are committed to continue collaboration to prepare for possible scenarios requiring mass cross-border evacuation and to test the procedures through joint civil protection exercises. This Joint Statement reflects our shared determination for joint action in order to protect our populations and uphold the highest level of emergency preparedness and response across the region, as well as determination of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland and Sweden to continue supporting Ukraine as long as it takes.