

Co-operation among the Baltic States

Published: 14.12.2021.

Co-operation among Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia is traditionally close, multi-faceted and pragmatic. It is based on the common interests and goals of the three countries in the following areas of foreign and security policy: the advancement of security and welfare, fostering economic development, and membership in the EU and NATO. Intensive co-operation is ongoing in the energy sector and on transport infrastructure projects.

The first steps in cooperation between Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia were made in the 1920s century, soon after the independence of the three countries. 85 years ago, on September 12, 1934, the foreign ministers of the Baltic States in Geneva, Switzerland, signed a Memorandum of Understanding between Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. It was in force until the occupation of the Baltic States. The cooperation of the Baltic States became particularly visible in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the struggle for the restoration of their independence and the Baltic Way - human chain on August 23, 1989. The Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Consensus and Co-operation Declaration was signed on 12 May 1990 in Tallinn, and on 13 June 1994 in Tallinn, the Prime Ministers of the Baltic States signed an agreement on co-operation between the parliaments and governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Within the framework of Baltic co-operation, active dialogue is ongoing at the level of Presidents, Speakers of Parliaments, Heads of Government, Ministers and experts. Baltic Parliamentary Cooperation takes place in the Baltic Assembly (BA), which was established on November 8, 1991. While intergovernmental co-operation takes place in the Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM), founded on 13 June 1994. They were created based on the model of the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers – provide a significant contribution to the harmonization of foreign policy and the promotion of practical co-operation among the Baltic States, while at the same time advancing Baltic and Nordic cooperation.

Baltic Assembly

The Baltic Assembly (BA) is an institution for parliamentary co-operation among Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania established on 8 November 1991. Each of the Baltic States is represented in the Assembly by a national delegation of 12-20 members of the parliament. The Assembly is a coordinating and consultative institution.

The Baltic Assembly has the right to make its views known to the national parliaments, governments and the Baltic Council of Ministers in the form of a resolution, decision, declaration or recommendation, while using the form of an appeal, proposal, or statement when addressing other international or regional organizations.

The Baltic Assembly sessions are held once a year. During Lithuanian Presidency, the 40th Baltic Assembly session and 27th Baltic Council was held on 4-5 November, 2021 in Vilnius. In 2022 during Latvian Presidency, the session of the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council will take place on 27-28 October in Riga.

Between sessions, the Presidium of the Baltic Assembly may make decisions about current issues on the international agenda.

There are five standing committees of the Baltic Assembly:

Economics, Energy and Innovations Committee

Education, Science and Culture Committee

Natural Resources and Environment Committee

Legal Affairs and Security Committee

Welfare Committee

Since 2003, the Baltic Assembly Presidency has been harmonized with the Baltic Council of Ministers and lasts one year.

rotating order, in 2020 the presiding country was Estonia, in 2021 Lithuania assumed these responsibilities, while in 2022 the presiding country is Latvia.

Baltic Assembly's website: <https://www.baltasam.org/>

Baltic Council of Ministers

The Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM), established on 13 June 1994, is an institution for governmental co-operation between Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

The Baltic Council of Ministers is charged with ensuring the continuity of co-operation at the executive level of the states. It is responsible for co-operation among the governments of the Baltic States, as well as co-operation between the governments and the Baltic Assembly (the national parliaments). The Baltic Council of Ministers makes decisions regarding the implementation of recommendations of the Baltic Assembly. It promotes broad and substantive mutual co-operation. The Baltic Council of Ministers has decision-making powers only if representatives of all three Baltic States are present. Decisions are made by consensus.

The presidency of the Baltic Council of Ministers is rotated annually among the Baltic States. Since 2003, the Baltic Assembly Presidency has been harmonized with the Baltic Council of Ministers Presidency and lasts one year. In rotating order, in 2020, the presiding country was Estonia, in 2021 Lithuania assumed these responsibilities, while in 2021 the presiding country is Latvia.

Priorities of the Latvian presidency of the BCM in 2022:

Regional security and defense, countering hybrid threats and disinformation.

Modernizing economy by advancing green and digital transition, connectivity and development of regional infrastructure projects.

Strengthening strategic and ambitious Eastern Partnership and support to civil society in Belarus.

Legal basis of the Baltic Council of Ministers

[Terms of Reference for the Baltic Council of Ministers](#)

[Regulations for the Committees of Senior Officials and Task Forces](#)

BCM Prime Ministers' Council

The Baltic Council of Ministers operates under the guidance of the Prime Ministers' Council, the highest decision-making body, which meets at least once a year. The Prime Ministers' Council adopts basic documents in the form of joint statements and approves priority areas of the Baltic States cooperation.

On 8 December 2021 Prime Ministers met in Vilnius for the final meeting of BCM Prime Ministers Council under the Lithuanian Presidency. The focus of the meeting was on the current security situation in the region, the fight against COVID-19, fast-rising electricity prices, progress towards the green and digital transition and the development of regional infrastructure projects. K. Kariņš presented the priorities of the Latvian Presidency of the BCM in 2022: strengthening regional security and defence, fighting disinformation and hybrid threats; modernising the economy, driving the green and digital transitions, connectivity and the development of regional infrastructure projects; strengthening the strategic Eastern Partnership and support to the civil society in Belarus.

Press Statement of Latvian Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš after 8 December 2021 BCM meeting can be found here: <https://www.mk.gov.lv/en/article/karins-through-joint-efforts-baltic-states-can-achieve-broader-impact>

BCM Co-operation Council

The BCM Co-operation Council consists of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Baltic States. The Co-operation Council is

responsible for the overall coordination of Baltic States cooperation. The Co-operation Council meets at least once a year.

The Baltic Council is a joint meeting of the Secretariat of the Baltic Assembly and the Co-operation Council, at which the Chairman of the Co-operation Council (Foreign Minister of the rotating presidency) presents an overview of the past year's work.

The Foreign Minister of the incoming presidency outlines to the Council its priorities and plans for next year, which are then included in the Joint Statement of the Baltic Council.

[The Joint Statement of the Baltic Council of 5 November 2021](#)

Press release of Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs following the 27th session of the Baltic Council can be found here: <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/minister-foreign-affairs-we-need-support-changes-european-union-legislation-would-allow-member-states-better-protect-their-borders>

Baltic Council of Ministers Secretariat

The Secretariat ensures the operation of the Baltic Council of Ministers. The Secretariat consists of the officials of the Foreign Ministries of the Baltic States who are responsible for the coordination of the Baltic State Cooperation. Annual changes in the Secretariat's leadership follow the rotating presidency of the Baltic Council of Ministers. The Secretariat is involved in preparation for the meetings of the Prime Ministers' Council, the Co-operation Council and the Baltic Council and serves as a link for exchange of information and documentation among officials of the Baltic States. The rotating leadership of the Secretariat formulates priorities for the Baltic States cooperation and drafts reports of the Chairman of the Co-operation Council to the Baltic Assembly and joint statements by the Baltic Council and the Baltic Council of Ministers.

BCM Committees of Senior Officials

In 1994, Committees of Senior Officials were established to ensure a more focused and structured activities at the level of sectoral ministries. Five standing Committees of Senior Officials have been operating since the BCM reform in 2005:

Defence

Energy

Home Affairs

Transport and Communications

Environment

A Committee of Senior Officials consists of one senior official from the respective sectoral ministry of each country and experts.

The Committees of Senior Officials implement the decisions taken by the Prime Ministers' Council and the Co-operation Council and carry out other assignments delegated to them by the Prime Ministers' Council, the Co-operation Council or other ministers. Within their sector of cooperation, the Committees of Senior Officials submit proposals for the priorities of Baltic co-operation and for the annual action plan of the Baltic Council of Ministers. The Committees of Senior Officials also produce reports about their activities during the year and present those to the Co-operation Council for consideration.

Task Forces can also be created for carrying out a specific task in the areas not covered by the Committees of Senior Officials. Task Forces are established by the Prime Ministers' Council on its own initiative or following a proposal of other Ministers in coordination with the Co-operation Council. The Prime Ministers' Council sets specific tasks to be performed by the Task Force within a definite time frame.

Co-operation between the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers

The Baltic Assembly (BA) and the Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM) have agreed on a closer and more effective co-operation. To achieve this, the trilateral Agreement on Baltic Governmental and Parliamentary Co-operation was amended in 2003, as was the protocol defining specific co-operation mechanisms in 2004. The result was the establishment of the above-mentioned Co-operation Council (the meeting of Foreign Ministers of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and the Baltic Council (the meeting of the Baltic Assembly's Presidium and the Co-operation Council of the BCM).

In accordance with the co-operation documents signed, co-operation between the Baltic Council of Ministers and Baltic Assembly take place at all levels – at the annual session of the Baltic Council, a meeting is held between the Baltic Assembly Presidium and the Co-operation Council of the BCM. Regular co-operation takes place between the secretariats of national delegations of the Baltic Council of Ministers and the Baltic Assembly. Members of the BCM Secretariat and BCM Committees of Senior Officials are invited to participate in Baltic Assembly committee sessions and thematic conferences.

As the Covid-19 pandemic crisis continued, the work of the Baltic Council of Ministers and the Baltic Assembly focused on a sustainable approach at the Baltic level, including in the area of restrictions and border crossings, ready to return to stronger restrictive measures if needed.

<https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/co-operation-among-baltic-states>