

# Minister of Foreign Affairs: In 2022, Latvia is preparing to apply for the role of an observer in the Arctic Council

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On 9 November 2021, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, Edgars Rinkēvičs, met with the Speaker of the Finnish Parliament, Anu Vehviläinen, the Minister for European Affairs and Ownership Steering, Titi Tupurainen, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Pekka Haavisto, in Helsinki, and visited the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats.

During the meeting with the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs, political dialogue between the two countries, co-operation in defence, culture and education, as well as regional co-operation, including in the Baltic and Nordic (NB8) settings, were discussed. They exchanged views on current issues in international relations, including the situation in Afghanistan.

E. Rinkēvičs thanked Finland for the help and support provided in sending artificial lung ventilators to Latvia for the care of Covid-19 patients. Ministers discussed EU cooperation to contain the Covid-19 pandemic. "It is important to maintain close EU coordination in the future, especially in view of the deteriorating epidemiological situation," stressed E. Rinkēvičs.

The Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs emphasized the great potential for co-operation in transport and infrastructure projects important for the economy of the Baltic Sea region and the European Union. E. Rinkēvičs expressed satisfaction with Finland's support and participation in Rail Baltica, as Finland's presence as an experienced Nordic country in this project is valuable. The Minister also called on Finnish entrepreneurs to invest in Rail Baltica's infrastructure.

Discussing current events in the Arctic region, E. Rinkēvičs emphasized that "the ongoing processes in the Arctic region also have a direct impact on the environment, economy and security of the Baltic Sea region. Given the growing importance of the Arctic region, Latvia is preparing to apply for the role of an observer in the Arctic Council in 2022. Latvia's priority areas would be climate change prevention and adaptation, environmental and ecological research, as well as logistics and digitalisation. We therefore want to use the preparatory process as a platform to deepen cooperation with the Nordic countries on issues such as climate change and regional development."

The ministerial talks also focused on the situation on the EU-Belarus border. The Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed the view that this is a hybrid operation systematically planned and organized by the Lukashenko regime, moving against not only Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, but also the EU as a whole. Therefore, a strong fifth round of sanctions would clearly demonstrate European solidarity against hybrid attacks that are currently being carried out by the Belarussian authorities. "It is important to impose sanctions on Belavia and other Belarusian companies that engage in or benefit from a hybrid attack on the European Union's external borders. It is also important to introduce changes to European Union legislation strengthening the capacity of Member States to guard their borders, including a further discussion on the possible allocation of European Union funds for the installation of a physical barrier at the external borders of the European Union," said E. Rinkēvičs.

During the meeting with T. Tupurainen, Minister for European Affairs and Ownership Steering of Finland, E. Rinkēvičs discussed migration and asylum policy, as well as climate policy issues.

During his working visit, E. Rinkēvičs also met with the Speaker of the Finnish Parliament (Eduskunta), A. Vehviläinen. The Foreign Minister expressed satisfaction with the close relations between Latvia and Finland. "This year marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Latvia and Finland, as well as the thirtieth anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic relations. We are glad that we are good partners in the European Union, in regional settings, as well as successfully cooperating in various fields and levels. A group of Parliament Members has been established and is operating in the Latvian Parliament to promote co-operation with the Finnish Parliament," said E. Rinkēvičs.

During his visit to Helsinki, the Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs visited the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats and gave an interview to Lännen Media.

<https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/minister-foreign-affairs-2022-latvia-preparing-apply-role-observer-arctic-council>