

During the NB8 visit in Odesa, Edgars Rinkēvičs underlines Latvia's unwavering support to Ukraine in the war against Russia

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On 28 April 2023, in Odesa, Ukraine, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, Edgars Rinkēvičs, together with the Foreign Ministers of the Baltic and Nordic countries (NB8) met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro *Kuleba*, visited the Odesa Commercial Port and took part in the opening event for the Odesa Reconstruction Forum.

In a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Edgars Rinkēvičs reaffirmed Latvia's unwavering solidarity with Ukraine and its people as they put up resistance against Russian aggression. The officials discussed Ukraine's accomplishments in the process of integration with the EU, current security situation, as well as ensuring Russia's accountability for its aggression against Ukraine.

The Foreign Minister said the EU should be ready to open accession talks with Ukraine as early as in 2023. This decision is important both to sustain the motivation of Ukrainian people during Russia's war of aggression, and also as a major incentive for further reforms in the country. The Minister also highlighted the reform process successfully implemented by Ukraine despite difficulties faced under the conditions of Russian invasion. "Ukraine's reforms, even under the current wartime conditions, are very highly rated. The steps taken by Ukraine in the fight against corruption and the strengthening of the judiciary deserve a special mention. Integration with the EU will require great effort and scrupulous work, in which a serious and effective implementation of reforms will be vital."

With a view to this year's NATO summit in Vilnius, Edgars Rinkēvičs expressed strong support from Latvia for Ukraine's aspirations to become a NATO member when that would be possible. Strengthening of the existing NATO-Ukraine practical cooperation is important at this point in time.

During a visit to the Odesa Commercial Port, the NB8 Foreign Ministers acquainted themselves with the port's work to ensure the transportation of Ukrainian agricultural products over the Black Sea. We can clearly see, Edgars Rinkēvičs noted, the security, economic, connectivity and environmental challenges faced by Ukraine in the Black Sea region. Despite obstacles created by

Russia, Ukraine's actions and involvement in the facilitation of exports of agricultural produce through the use of the Black Sea Grain Initiative (Grain from Ukraine) and the EU's Solidarity Lanes contribute indispensably to the reduction of the global food crisis, the Foreign Minister said.

At the opening of the Odesa Reconstruction Forum, Edgars Rinkēvičs affirmed that Latvia would continue to provide all forms of support to Ukraine. "Latvia's priority in 2023 is support and reconstruction in Chernihiv Region. It is vital to ensure that Ukraine's EU integration and the reconstruction process go hand in hand in order for the process of rebuilding to facilitate Ukraine's becoming part of the EU", Edgars Rinkēvičs said.

Latvia's support to Ukraine to date exceeds EUR 508 million, which represents 1.24% of GDP.

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