

## **Distinguished participants and guests of the XVII Union of the Baltic Cities General Conference,**

It is my pleasure to join this important event, maybe more important than ever before. Because the focus of discussions is directly related to the present and the future of Europe. An integral part of which is Ukraine. Which has been attacked by Russian terrorists, defends itself, but also the whole Europe, your countries, cities, and communities from authoritarianism and medieval barbarism.

Representatives of the Ukrainian cities who are here today can tell what war is like, what unbelievable for XXI century sufferings bring putin regime and his military machine.

Thank you for your assistance to Ukraine, your desire to hear Ukrainians, and to bring new impetus to support of Ukraine on the way to victory. Our common victory of human dignity and values over destruction and humiliation.

All of us, including the residents of the cities you represent, want to live in peace, do not want to hide in bunkers from rockets, as Ukrainians do every day, but to work peacefully, to take children to kindergartens without a rescue suitcase, and when asked to tell them about the war as a story from the past.

Freedom must be protected every day both in times of war and peace. It is the business not only of the government but of every citizen and every community. Unfortunately, there are always those who want to take away our freedom and to impose their will by force, to undermine legal order and to bring chaos. This is the essence of Russian imperialism which has not changed for centuries.

Fate of freedom and the future of Europe is being decided today in Ukraine. Russia demonstrates readiness for the protracted war of attrition, hoping to win with the use of its still considerable resources, war fatigue and nuclear blackmail. While our Forces of Defense are actively dismantling Russia's military machine.

Ukraine's victory in this war, restoration of its territorial integrity and integration into EU and NATO is the only way to restore and sustainably protect stability and rules-based order in Europe and the world. Ukraine's victory on the battlefield must be a strategic goal for all of Europeans and global democratic community.

All partners should maintain momentum in providing support to Ukraine – political, financial, humanitarian and military. The speed and consistency of weapons delivery remain critical as it is the straightest path to victory and peace.

All of us in Ukraine, military, and civilians, are working hard for victory. Including building a powerful defense-industries in Ukraine in close cooperation with our partners from all over the world.

While taking every step to defeat the enemy we think about future just and lasting peace. The Peace Formula of President Zelenskyi is universal in its nature and is a foundation not only to end Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, but also to establish an effective algorithm to protect freedom and legal order and to overcome regional and global crises.

Russia's war against Ukraine has drastically worsened security in the Baltic Sea region and in the whole of Europe. It is obvious: without Ukraine there can be no effective European security architecture. I am talking about Ukraine's full membership in the EU and NATO. We are looking forward to consolidated quick political decisions by the state-members.

Without Ukraine's accession to the EU the union will not achieve its three main goals - security, prosperity, and economic growth.

Ukraine's membership in NATO is crucial to increasing security in the Baltic Sea region and further strengthening the Alliance. A grey zone of security only provokes the appetite of Russian aggressor.

There is no alternative to the isolation of Russia. Sanctions against Russia, but also Belarus and Iran must be tightened. We must ensure accountability for those responsible for the crime of aggression and war crimes.

We are grateful for actions taken collectively and individually by every state and every community in support of Ukraine. Everything you do for Ukraine is an investment in our common better protected present and future.

Regions and municipalities of your countries played a very important role in maintaining the resilience of Ukraine. Under your leadership a huge multifaceted assistance for Ukraine has been mobilized, including for Ukrainian women and children which fled the atrocities of the war.

I cannot but mention today the solidarity of the Lithuanian municipalities and people which is truly unprecedented. Numerous fundraising campaigns by Lithuanians became a breakthrough for Europe, for the whole world.

Lithuanian brothers and sisters help our people in every way to recover from the experience of "packing the whole life into one suitcase" and find a second home in Lithuania at least temporarily one. Ukrainians got the opportunity to work, study in schools according to Ukrainian programs, integrate, receive medical care. Under the patronage of the First Ladies of Lithuania and Ukraine, the cultural and educational space – Ukrainian Center in Vilnius was established. A flagship project in EU member states that has become a unique example of cooperation.

We thank Palanga, Klaipeda, Kaunas as well as Gdansk, Tallinn, Helsinki, Hamburg, other UBC member cities, all true friends of Ukraine and Ukrainians. True friends of freedom and democracy.

We need help not only to win on the battlefield. We need further assistance to restore and protect the energy sector, to rebuild its infrastructure, without waiting for the end of the war. Russia continues its massive missile attacks and will escalate through the coming winter to freeze Ukrainians.

The main priorities of Ukraine's rapid recovery include energy sphere, humanitarian demining, housing, critical and social infrastructure, supporting economy.

At the Reconstruction Conference in London this year, Ukraine launched the Digital Reconstruction Ecosystem for Accountable Management, a fully transparent electronic platform to coordinate all stages of reconstruction project implementation.

The global project United24, initiated by the President of Ukraine allows everyone to join in supporting Ukraine and provide real assistance to Ukrainian citizens affected by the war.

Restoring Ukraine is an important area of economic diplomacy and cooperation between partner cities. Now Ukraine is forming a coalition of businesses and partners to invest in recovery, which will complement intergovernmental partnerships, provide the necessary resources, and bring long-term benefits to all stake holders.

Helping Ukraine is a win-win situation. A restored, stable, and prosperous Ukraine will serve as a prerequisite for lasting peace in Europe.

Ukrainians share a strong belief in the victory of Ukraine as soon as possible and bravely fight for the freedom.

May your municipalities and your communities continue to be motivated, brave, united in supporting Ukraine.

Glory to Ukraine!