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## Poland's Northern Policy and Nordic-Baltic Cooperation

**The Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) represents a dynamic model of regional cooperation that has united the five Nordic and three Baltic states in security, development and solidarity efforts since the 1990s. The evolution of NB8's areas of cooperation – from supporting the Baltic states' post-Soviet transition to current priorities like defense policy, cybersecurity, and energy – reflects shifts in Northern Europe's geopolitical landscape. The role of NB8 states is particularly significant in coordinating responses to Russian threats and providing robust support for Ukraine. Additionally, the new strategic partnership agreement between Poland and Sweden underscores the critical importance of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) in Poland's foreign and security policy.**

**Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8).** The Nordic-Baltic cooperation format – NB8 – was established in the early 1990s to foster regional collaboration, bringing together five Nordic and three Baltic states. Initially focused on assisting Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia in strengthening their independence, the agenda shifted significantly after the Baltic states joined the EU and NATO. In 2010, NB8 foreign ministers established a Nordic-Baltic “wise men” group to explore ways to enhance cooperation. The resulting Birkavs-Gade Report<sup>1</sup> (August 2010) recommended strengthening collaboration in six areas: foreign policy dialogue, diplomatic representation, civil security (including cybersecurity), defense, energy, and the NB8 brand development.

Since then, NB8 has built a robust cooperation network spanning political, military, economic, and cultural dimensions. These interactions, alongside membership in international organizations such as the United Nations (“[IEŚ Commentaries](#)”, No. 370), EU, NATO, OSCE, World Bank, and regional forums like the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) (“[IEŚ Commentaries](#)”, No. 286), the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), and the Helsinki Commission – HELCOM, necessitate closer coordination. NB8 states regularly discuss current international policy issues and practical cooperation matters, particularly Northern Europe's security dynamics post-2020 Belarusian presidential elections (“[IEŚ Commentaries](#)”, No. 252) and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (“[IEŚ Commentaries](#)”, No. 875). Annual coordination (rotating among members) sets the agenda, while high-level meetings and expert consultations (several dozen annually) operate on a consensus-based, informal framework.

In addition to regional cooperation, NB8 has expanded to include so-called partnership formats. One of the most important is the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE), initiated by the United States in 2003. The e-PINE forum is guided by three principles: multilateral engagement, building resilient societies by strengthening democratic institutions and exporting success and best practices. Meetings of foreign ministers of the NB8 and Visegrad Group (“NB8+V4”) countries were also held between 2013 and 2021, initiated by Polish and Swedish Foreign Ministers Radosław Sikorski and Carl Bildt. The latest – the ninth – meeting was held in Finland in September 2021.

**Nordic-Baltic Summit.** On November 27–28, 2024, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson invited Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk to a Nordic-Baltic head of government summit in Harpsund, reflecting Sweden's 2024 NB8 chairmanship. The Swedish presidency's priorities included strengthening Nordic-Baltic security cooperation, unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and continuing efforts to further global support for Ukraine and an international world order based on the principles of the UN Charter. In their joint

<sup>1</sup> *NB8 Wise Men Report*, August 2010, <https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/utanrikisraduneyti-media/media/skyrslur/nb8-wise-men-report.pdf>

statement, NB8 and Polish leaders committed to intensifying support for Ukraine, countering Russian aggression, and expanding sanctions on the Russian Federation, recognising it as a long-term threat.

All NB8 states, now NATO members, are jointly focused on bolstering the Alliance's deterrence capabilities in Northern Europe and nullifying Russia's ability to pose a threat in the region (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1236](#)). A common awareness and assessment of the situation in the BSR's immediate vicinity unites the Northern European countries and echoes in the work of regional structures, such as the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). Sweden's 2024 NCM presidency prioritised security alongside transforming the Nordic region into the world's most sustainable and integrated area. In 2025, Finland will emphasise strengthening the resilience of the Nordic states and comprehensive planning for civil crises and hybrid threats (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1045](#)). In doing so, it refers to the current priorities of the CBSS and the EUSBSR (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1187](#)), as well as Poland's proposal to establish a Baltic Sea patrol mission to protect critical infrastructure (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1043](#)).

**New Polish-Swedish Strategic Partnership.** Following the Nordic-Baltic Summit, the prime ministers of Sweden, Ulf Kristersson, and Poland, Donald Tusk, signed a new strategic partnership agreement. The document identifies eight areas of bilateral cooperation: security and defense; support for Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership; migration and security of the EU's external border; trade and investment cooperation; the European single market and competitiveness; energy, climate and environment in the BSR; the rule of law and human rights; and cultural and people-to-people contacts. Security cooperation has intensified following Sweden's accession to NATO, which has positively impacted the basin's maritime security (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1075](#)). This has also enabled the development of bilateral political and economic cooperation. In 2023, Sweden ranked as Poland's ninth-largest import and eighth-largest export partner within the EU.

The development of cooperation between the two countries is part of the BSR's growing importance for Poland's foreign and security policy (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1023](#)), which also has implications on other dimensions. In 2023, Poland imported about 6.5 bcm of natural gas (about 46% of total imports) via the Swinoujście LNG terminal, which means that 268 LNG cargoes (currently 326 LNG cargoes) were received from the terminal's launch in December 2015 until the end of 2023. Considering the 6.3 billion cubic meters (about 44%) received through the Baltic gas pipeline, this allowed for the complete replacement of imports from Russia. Also, seaport data prove that they are increasingly important in European logistics and international trade. In 2023, they handled a record 143.6 million tons (+9.56% compared to 2022, in 2018 it was just over 100 million tons), and revenue to the state budget from VAT, customs and excise duties amounted to PLN 9.27 billion. While intermodal handling at Polish ports declined slightly in 2023 (Baltic Hub in Gdansk – down from 2.07 to 2.05 million TEUs; container terminal in Gdynia – down from 911 to 873.4 thousand TEUs), as a result of the weaker trade and industry, container transshipments increased in the first half of 2024. Polish ports handled just under 1.6 million TEUs, an increase of 8.28% compared to the same period last year.

**Conclusions.** NB8 cooperation has evolved from its initial support for the Baltic states in strengthening their independence to more comprehensive regional security efforts, including cyber security and defense. Particular emphasis has been placed on coordinating against threats from Russia and supporting Ukraine in the face of aggression, demonstrating the growing importance of this format in building stability in Northern Europe. Traditionally, representatives of the six NB8 countries (except Iceland and Norway) meet before major EU meetings to coordinate common positions on various EU policy issues. The importance of this group, enlarged by Poland, is also due to the timetable for the presidency of the EU Council in 2025, when Poland and, in the second half of the year, Denmark will be in charge.

The signing of a new agreement between Poland and Sweden after the Nordic-Baltic Summit indicates a desire to deepen cooperation in key areas such as security, defence, energy, climate and human rights. At the same time, it shows Poland's growing role as an important actor in the BSR, both in terms of security policy and the economy.

Denmark will take over the coordination of the NB8's work in the next year. Although it has not yet presented its priorities, given Denmark's recent foreign and security policy directions (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 852](#)) and its support for Ukraine, a continuation of the group's current course is to be expected. Since the outbreak of the war, direct aid to Ukraine has reached about DKK 53.4 billion (about €8.2 billion) in military support (in early December, Denmark transferred a second batch of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine) and about DKK 5.2 billion (about €700 million) in civilian aid. Particular emphasis will be placed on strengthening resilience to hybrid attacks, providing comprehensive support to Ukraine, as well as strengthening EU sanctions on Russia and extending them to the so-called "shadow fleet" (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1042](#)).