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PRESS RELEASE

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STATEMENT BY THE LEADERS OF THE BUCHAREST NINE

We, the leaders of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and the Slovak Republic, met today in Bratislava. We welcome the participation of the NATO Secretary General at our meeting. As the war continues on the European continent, together, we have discussed the most pressing security threats and challenges to our region and the whole Euro-Atlantic area, and assessed the preparation of the upcoming NATO Summit in Vilnius.

We reaffirm our unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. This is the only way to restore peace and the rules-based order in Europe. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the unjustified and illegal brutal war against Ukraine.

Ukraine has a legitimate right to defend itself against this aggression according to international law, including the UN Charter. Russia must stop its continuous attacks on the Ukrainian civilian population and infrastructure, deportation of children, and conflict related sexual violence. Those responsible for the crime of aggression, all atrocities and war crimes must be held accountable. We support the establishment of an appropriate legal mechanism to ensure accountability for the crime of aggression against Ukraine. We will continue helping Ukraine to reach a peaceful solution on its own terms for as long as necessary, including by military, financial and humanitarian support. Our countries have provided protection to the largest number of Ukrainian refugees.

We call on Russia to immediately stop hostilities and unconditionally withdraw its forces from the territory of Ukraine. We also condemn all those, including Belarus, who are actively facilitating Russia's war effort. We remain determined to sustain international pressure on Russia, including through sanctions. We urge Belarus to stop its complicity to the Russian aggression which constitutes a blatant violation of international law.

NATO has reacted decisively to the drastic deterioration of Euro-Atlantic security caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine. We have enhanced the Allied military presence in the Eastern Flank, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and we are substantially strengthening our posture for deterrence and forward defence, as defensive measures.

Russia is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and we must be prepared for it to remain so. NATO's commitment to protecting every inch of Allied territory and to Article 5 is ironclad. We expect that the Vilnius Summit will further strengthen NATO's defence posture on the Eastern flank in order to deter and deny any opportunity for aggression. In particular, this includes advancing forward defences with robust in-place, multi-domain and combat-ready forces, including brigades in the land domain; where needed, prepositioning equipment and stocks; rapidly available reinforcements; command and control and force structures fit for purpose, and improving or extending relevant infrastructure, including the extension of the NATO Pipeline System. We especially recognize the importance of enhanced Integrated Air and Missile Defence on a rotational persistent basis for the security of the Eastern Flank. We support NATO's new regional plans as the cornerstone of our modernised collective defence and we urge all Allies to assign forces and capabilities to these activities.

Russia and other authoritarian actors and strategic competitors, and their proxies, as well as non-state actors, are using hybrid attacks to advance their goals. They seek to exploit our openness, interconnectedness and digitalisation by trying to interfere in our democratic processes and institutions, by promoting disinformation campaigns. Their aim is to undermine trust in our societies, instrumentalizing politically sensitive issues, conducting malicious activities in cyberspace, or manipulating energy supplies. These malign actors also abuse migratory flows. All these activities have become more aggressive, coordinated and aimed at undermining our unity, cohesion, security, and stability.

We shall enhance and invest more, individually and collectively, in our ability to prepare for, deter, and defend, in all domains, and in line with NATO's 360-degree approach. All our actions must be adequately resourced and enabled. We expect the Vilnius Defence Investment Pledge to commit to 2% of GDP for defence becoming a floor, not a ceiling, and encourage all Allies to do so. We will coordinate our activities in order to further expand our defence production capacities and to strengthen our capabilities and ensure adequate supplies.

We welcome Finland as a new member of the Alliance and fully support Sweden to become a full-fledged member soon. Their accession further strengthens the Alliance and makes the Baltic Sea region as well as the whole Euro-Atlantic area more secure.

Since February 2022, NATO has significantly stepped up its assistance to Ukraine, reflecting Kyiv's needs. The Vilnius Summit shall further enhance our political and practical support to Ukraine. We aim for a more robust, multi-year, and comprehensive support package for Ukraine, which will reinforce its defence capabilities also by implementing NATO standards and increasing interoperability with NATO. We see merit in several Allies' proposal to establish a Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre with Ukraine based in Poland. In light of Russia's war of aggression, we will continue our strong support to bolster Ukraine's capacity to defend itself and to relieve the humanitarian catastrophe. These efforts are complementary to those who are providing bilateral military assistance, including through the US-led Ukraine Defence Contact Group.

Ukraine is an integral part of the Euro-Atlantic community and its security is intertwined with that of the Allies. We strongly support Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and reiterate the Bucharest 2008 decision that Ukraine will become a member of NATO. In this respect, we expect that in Vilnius, we will upgrade our political relations with Ukraine to a new level, and launch a new political track that will lead to Ukraine's membership in NATO, once conditions allow. We will continue our support to Ukraine on this path, also as a means to prevent the repetition of Russia's aggression. We encourage Ukraine to continue its reforms in accordance with all the Principles of the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Ukraine. We recognize that reforms are essential to further Ukraine's progress on the path to EU and NATO membership.

We will further our efforts to assess and adapt NATO's approach to Russia.

We fully recognize the strategic importance of the Baltic Sea, Black Sea, and Western Balkans regions for the Alliance. We will continue to further strengthen NATO's support to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova to build their integrity and resilience against any malign influence. In this respect, we commend the Republic of Moldova for its efforts to maintain stability and advance reforms on its European path.

At the NATO Summit in Vilnius we expect to further step up our cooperation also with like-minded countries, and particularly with Indo-Pacific partners and with the EU, in tackling a wide range of common challenges.

We count on China's responsible role as a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council. Any provision of lethal aid by China to the Russian aggressor would be unacceptable and would only prolong the conflict and deepen global instability.

We firmly believe that the summit in Vilnius will be a historic success. The Alliance is stronger and more united than ever. We, the Bucharest 9 countries, will continue to work tirelessly to further strengthen our unity and solidarity, our enduring transatlantic bond, and to enhance our security, defence and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.

We will continue to strive for peace, security and stability in the whole of the Euro-Atlantic area.