

Joint statement by Defence Ministers of the Joint Expeditionary Force

Today the ten Defence Ministers of the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) met at Belvoir Castle in England: the UK, together with Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

We reaffirm the importance of the JEF as a group of like-minded and proactive nations, with shared purpose and values, and a common focus on security and stability in the High North, North Atlantic and Baltic Sea region. Ten nations that are stronger when working together, the JEF gives us the ability to act collectively in an agile and responsive way to meet the variety of security challenges we face, however they arise, in that part of Europe we call home. The JEF is designed from first principles to be complementary to NATO's Deterrence and Defence posture.

Never has the JEF been more important and relevant than it is today. During the course of our meeting the Russian Federation has recognised Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions as independent states, breaching Minsk agreements and international law. All ten Defence Ministers are united in our condemnation of that unjustified act, the build-up of Russian forces on the border with Ukraine, and further incursion in the Donbas region.

We strongly support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and reiterate the right of all sovereign nations to choose their own path, their own security arrangements and their own alliances, free from external aggression and coercion, as a fundamental principle of the European security order. We call on Russia to de-escalate and encourage them to engage in transparent dialogue, including through the OSCE and the NATO-Russia Council, in order to reduce tensions. We also condemn the instrumentalization of migration flows and other hybrid activity towards Latvia, Lithuania and Poland by the Belarussian regime.

We have reviewed the progress we have made in the development of the JEF as an agile, capable, and ready force, and today agreed to undertake a series of integrated military activities across our part of northern Europe – at sea, on land and in the air. For example, we will shortly conduct an exercise demonstrating JEF nations' freedom of movement in the Baltic Sea. These and subsequent activities will remain preventative and proportionate. In acting together, we shall demonstrate the JEF's solidarity, capability, and resolve to stand together for security and stability in our region.