

**Deputy Assistant Secretary Chris Smith's Remarks to the
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Europe**

May 14, 2026

Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Europe, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on U.S. relations with our Baltic Allies—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The United States' partnerships with the Baltics are strong, durable, and strategically vital. These nations are not only steadfast Allies within NATO, but also leaders in advancing democratic governance, economic resilience, and regional security in Europe and beyond. They often carry our message in rooms where the United States is not always present, including in the EU.

At a time of heightened geopolitical competition and continued instability due to the Russia-Ukraine war, our Baltic Allies remain among the clearest voices in defense of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and strength through transatlantic cooperation.

The level and tempo of U.S. engagement with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania reflects the high esteem and strategic importance the United States places on our Baltic Allies. This is not rhetorical—it is demonstrated through sustained, high-frequency, and high-level interaction across the U.S. government.

Since the beginning of this Administration, there has been a steady cadence of senior-level engagements, including Cabinet-level meetings, Department of War consultations with Baltic defense ministers, regular State Department seventh floor engagements, and ongoing congressional delegations and staff visits to the region. These engagements are complemented by continuous coordination through NATO structures and day-to-day embassy-level diplomacy in all three capitals.

I have myself been to the region six times in the course of this administration. I am proud to work with Special Envoy John Coale in his efforts to negotiate with the Lukashenka regime in Belarus to secure the release of hundreds of political prisoners who had been held captive in Belarus. This important line of effort

would not be possible without the logistical and political support provided to the United States by Lithuania.

On the bilateral front, our cooperation has never been closer. The United States maintains robust defense, economic, and people-to-people ties with each country. Estonia has distinguished itself as a global leader in digital governance and cybersecurity, hosting the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. Latvia plays a central role in regional logistics and energy diversification, including through its natural gas infrastructure and its leadership in advancing transatlantic economic ties. Lithuania continues to demonstrate principled leadership on economic security issues, including as the gateway for U.S. LNG into the region and with its efforts to counter coercive practices and deepen supply chain resilience. All prioritize buying American, especially when it comes to defense materiel.

Our Baltic Allies have also demonstrated that their commitment to shared security extends well beyond their immediate region. All three countries quickly committed to, and this year will meet President Trump's call for NATO Allies to spend at least 5 percent of GDP on defense. Lithuania and Estonia, which will spend roughly 5.4 percent of GDP on defense this year, lead all Allies in per capita spending. Earlier this year, Latvia became the first NATO Ally to enshrine into law an annual commitment to spend 5 percent of GDP on core defense, going well beyond the NATO commitment of 3.5 percent on core defense requirements.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have consistently supported U.S.-led operations globally, including through contributions to coalition efforts such as Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. More recently, they have offered meaningful political support, niche capabilities, and enabling contributions to U.S. efforts in Operation Epic Fury, underscoring their reliability as security partners and their willingness to shoulder shared burdens in addressing global threats.

Multilaterally, our cooperation is equally strong. In addition to their commitment to NATO, their participation in the Three Seas Initiative underscores a shared commitment to strengthening regional infrastructure, connectivity, and energy security. Latvia's role as a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council advances U.S. interests by strengthening the voice of a trusted NATO Ally who shares our priorities, particularly regarding European security. The United States

strongly supports these efforts, which align with our broader strategic goal of a Europe that is militarily capable, economically fair, and culturally aligned. Economically, while trade and investment ties are deepening, there is still room for growth. There are opportunities to deepen U.S. commercial engagement, particularly in sectors such as energy, advanced manufacturing, and critical technologies, including in defense. Additionally, as small economies, the Baltic states remain vulnerable to external economic shocks and coercion, underscoring the need for continued collaboration on economic security, resilience, and diversification.

The threats facing the Baltics are real and persistent. Foremost among them are Russia's hostile activities and destabilizing behavior in the region. This includes military posturing along NATO's eastern flank, cyberattacks, escalating hybrid campaigns, and efforts to exploit societal divisions and undercut Allies' military mobility through sabotage and subversion.

At the same time, China presents a longer-term strategic challenge. While Baltic nations have taken important steps to reduce dependencies and reassess their engagement with China, continued vigilance and cooperation is necessary to guard against economic coercion, technology transfer risks, and influence operations.

In response to these threats, the United States is working closely with our Baltic Allies to enhance deterrence and defense. This includes strengthening NATO's forward presence, expanding joint training and exercises, and increasing investments in infrastructure and readiness. We are also deepening cooperation on cybersecurity and protecting critical infrastructure.

Energy security remains another key priority. Lithuania is a regional leader and hosts the NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence. The Baltics have officially severed all ties with Russian energy, including electricity, natural gas, and oil, achieving complete independence in February 2025 when they joined the European power grid. The United States continues to support these efforts, including through increased exports of U.S. liquefied natural gas and collaboration on civil nuclear energy projects. I'm pleased to report that nearly 80 percent of all LNG imported by Baltics comes from the United States. The Lithuanians have also engineered delivery of U.S. LNG to Ukraine.

In closing, our partnerships with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are a model of what strong alliances can achieve. For well over 100 years of continuous diplomatic engagement, our relationship with the Baltics states has been grounded in shared values, mutual interests, and a common commitment to security and prosperity. Their support for U.S. operations—including Operation Epic Fury—demonstrates that even small states can make outsized contributions to collective security. As we look ahead, the United States remains firmly committed to standing with our Baltic Allies—strengthening our cooperation, addressing shared challenges, and ensuring that the transatlantic community remains resilient in the face of evolving threats.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.