

PRESS RELEASE

Background information

The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

Münster/Westphalia, January 17, 2018 - The three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been members of both the European Union and NATO since May 1, 2004. They are committed to developing and consolidating their democracies in Europe. This brings back memories of the so-called "Baltic Chain", with which millions of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians formed the largest human chain in history in 1989. They demonstrated for independence, freedom and their path to democracy within the European Union.

Almost 30 years later, the Baltic states are generally regarded as model European countries. Within a very short space of time, the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians have succeeded in establishing functioning democracies that are firmly committed to the principles of the rule of law, universal human rights and a free market economy. Due to this exemplary development path of the three countries after regaining their independence, it makes sense to honor and strengthen them for their special efforts towards integration in Europe. For this reason, the three Baltic states are being awarded the 2018 International Prize of the Peace of Westphalia.

Thematically and chronologically embedded This year's award ceremony is part of the large-scale project "Peace.Europe", which is being realized in the European Cultural Heritage Year "ECHY 2018" by the cities of Münster and Osnabrück, which have felt particularly committed to the idea of peace since 1648.

The topics of "peace" and "national security" have been of particular concern to the populations of the three Baltic countries since they gained their independence at the beginning of the 1990s. Due to their exposed location as northern "outposts" of the EU, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are not free from potential vulnerability today. Conflict scenarios once again appear to be within the realm of the conceivable. As the three countries, with a total population of "only" around six million people, would be militarily vulnerable in any case, permanent integration into the EU and NATO is the focus of common foreign policy interests.

2018, the year of the Peace Prize award, marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Estonian and Latvian states and the restoration of the Lithuanian state. Today, the three Baltic states are firmly integrated into the Western system of values and alliances. With their capitals Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius, they have become "visitor magnets" for many Europeans due to their cultural diversity and historical backgrounds.

As members of the eurozone, the three countries have a high level of political and economic stability and have all demonstrated responsibility in successfully assuming the presidency of the EU Council since joining the European Union. In the development of the European economy, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania already occupy leading positions. Their advanced digitalization in business, administration and education is considered exemplary in Europe.

The heads of state of the three countries will be invited to Münster to accept the Peace Prize: two female presidents and one male president. Kersti Kaljulaid has been President of Estonia since October 2016, Dalia Grybauskaitė has been President of Lithuania since May 2009 and Raimonds Vējonis has been President of Latvia since July 2015.