

## **Creating the Future for Nordic Baltic Leaders**

**On a sunny day 23rd of May five leadership programmes with participants from Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Sweden gathered at Quality Hotel Arlanda XPO in Sweden to discuss current topics, co-operation, and their leadership journeys.**

This was the first time all the bilateral programmes gathered and an event like this was arranged. The aim was to get the participants to make cross-border contacts and encourage them to international collaborations through inspiring keynotes and discussions. The hall was filled with over a hundred eager young leaders networking with each other. First on stage was the former Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs **Ann Linde**. She highlighted the importance of personal relations and continued by stating that the Nordic relations are the most valuable and of strategic importance, and it is important that the Nordic countries strive to work together. Linde stated that this is especially vital now when all the Nordic countries are members of NATO, with expertise in maritime issues and the Arctic. Linde did also emphasise that the Nordic co-operation has not only been a success saga and described as an example how the Vision 2030 – the idea that the Nordic region would be the world's most integrated and sustainable region by 2030 – totally

crashed during the Covid-pandemic and how the varying handling of the pandemic put a strain on Nordic relations. Linde reminded that even the strongest relations must be nurtured and emphasised to the audience how important it is to further strengthen the relations between our countries. In Lindes words - our common aims: free market, free trade, and open borders in the Nordic and Baltic countries - brings us together and make us stronger in a global context.

The former president of Estonia **Toomas Hendrik Ilves** started his keynote with the question “Where the hell are we going?”. The president substantiated his question by reflecting over contemporary history and the differences in Eastern Europe's more reserved view on Russia compared to Western Europe's optimism. Ilves mentioned many of the global events that brought us to a point of war in Europe and how many of the earlier warning signals were ignored by the West. Until the end, Ilves stressed, the West did not believe Russia would cross the border into Ukraine while Eastern Europe was afraid of the worst. The president proclaimed that we are now entering a new era. In the words of G. W. F. Hegel, Ilves said that “the owl of Minerva takes flight only at dusk” and explained how we often are blind to the events of our time, and we only see the changes that brought us to the tipping points of history in hindsight. Ilves continued by marking that the charter of the

United Nations has lost its meaning, Finland and Sweden are a part of NATO and Europe has a new geography of security. The president stated that everything has changed, and it is getting darker. He rounded up his keynote by stressing how important it is that the military co-operation takes off and that Europe co-operate fast and efficiently so that Russia understand we are a serious actor.

Next the audience was addressed by the director of the Nordic Council of Ministers' office in Estonia **Maria Gratschew** who in many ways embodied the Nordic-Baltic co-operation, being stationed in Estonia, born, and raised in Sweden with a Danish father and Finnish-Russian mother. She spoke about the Nordic-Estonian relations and how Estonians have a lot to contribute, especially within cyber security. Gratschew urged the audience to find balanced co-operations that both parties can gain on. On the question on why the Baltics and Nordics should co-operate, her answer was brief and to the point: We have a stronger voice together.

After this the chairs on the stage were filled by former and current participants of the leadership programmes: **Cecilia Flodin**, Director of Marketing of Hotel Operations, Strawberry; **Ida Karlberg Gidlund**, CEO of Teach for Sweden; **Kerli Ats**, CEO of Estonian Farmers' Federation; **Darius Kavinauskas**, Strategic Development Manager at Svenska Kraftnät; and **Madara**

**Mazjane**, Gender Equality Expert and trainer on Gender-based Violence Prevention, Inclusion and Diversity at the Ministry of Welfare of Latvia. They reflected on their leadership journeys, the values they thought was most important in leadership today and in the future, and of course how they collaborate over the borders with each other's countries.

The first part of the evening was wrapped up by **Noura Berrouba**, Chair of the Swedish Youth movement and Board member of the Swedish-Norwegian Cooperation Fund. Berrouba focused on leadership and the many aspects of Nextgen Leadership that must be considered by responsible leaders while staying true to our core values, democracy and thriving ecosystems.

After Berrouba, the hall filled with chatter when the young leaders of today meet their counterparts from the neighbouring countries. The evening ended with a dinner where the participants had the possibility to dive deeper into the discussed topics. "I have met people that I probably never would have met, and I have gotten the chance to discuss different and surprising topics" – was a takeaway that many participants mentioned afterwards.

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