

**2024 Ministerial Meeting on the Baltic Sea Marine Environment**  
**25.04.2024. Riga, Latvia**

**Welcome speech by Ms Inga Bērziņa, Minister of Environmental Protection  
and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia**

Madam Chair,

Executive Secretary,

Dear colleagues and HELCOM partners,

- It is my great pleasure and honour to welcome you to Riga!
- The Ministerial meeting on the Baltic Sea Marine Environment followed by the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Convention is the major and culminating event during the Latvian Chairmanship of HELCOM.
- This meeting is taking place in an unprecedented geopolitical situation that has never been experienced in the history of HELCOM. It was a great challenge for Latvia as the Chairmanship, and, I think, to all of you.
- However, we - the Member States of the European Union together with the European Commission, were able to mobilise and continue the regional cooperation so needed for the Baltic Sea environment.
- Of course, this would not be possible without the support of our trusted partners, including scientific community and non-governmental organisations.
- Today, we will discuss the findings of the latest state of the Baltic Sea report. Unfortunately, they show only little or no improvement.
- Therefore, we have to work harder and better toward our shared vision of the healthy marine environment.

- The Ministerial Declaration of this meeting notes progress achieved in the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan. However, it also stresses the need to tackle the crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.
- I am confident that we will be able to agree on the next steps needed to fully implement the Plan and to improve the state of the Baltic Sea.
- Our reaffirmed commitment to continued cooperation within HELCOM and with other organisations regionally and globally will also contribute to this aim.
- I am looking forward to productive discussion. I wish you an inspiring exchange of views and experiences!
- I hope that the exchange of ideas will also be facilitated by this venue, which has both national importance and symbolic meaning for Latvians. National Library is also known as the “Castle of Light”, which represents the wisdom and determination to achieve the goal.