

# Six North Sea countries join forces to secure critical infrastructure

## Joint Declaration on cooperation regarding protection of infrastructure in the North Sea

Damage to energy pipelines and subsea fibre optic cables has placed the resilience and security of critical underwater infrastructure in the North Sea high on the agenda. At the North Sea Summit on 24 April 2023 in Belgium, national security advisers from nine countries met to discuss better cooperation on the security of our energy and telecommunications infrastructure. This resulted in the Joint declaration on cooperation regarding protection of infrastructure in the North Sea. This declaration was signed today by six North Sea countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, the UK, and Denmark. The declaration sets out an agreement to cooperate and share information on the protection of underwater infrastructure.

There is a significant volume of critical infrastructure in the North Sea. This includes subsea fibre optic cables, gas and oil pipelines, electrical interconnectors and wind farm installations. It is crucial that this infrastructure is secure and resilient to preserve international communications and energy security.

### The importance of cooperation

Due to the interconnected nature of subsea infrastructure across North Sea territories, the need for a regional approach to its security and protection is clear. Adopting a joint approach when it comes to resilience and security is in the interest of all North Sea countries.

### Joint declaration

These shared interests are now confirmed by Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, the UK, and Denmark with the signing of the Joint Declaration on cooperation regarding protection of infrastructure in the North Sea. The aim is to join forces in order to take appropriate measures and exchange information and best practices. The Joint Declaration focuses on resilience and prevention and is therefore complementary to NATO's endeavours, which all participants involved are part of.

Paul Van Tigchelt, Belgian Minister of the North Sea: "The first condition for energy independence is securing that same energy independence. The threats and challenges have increased considerably in recent months. At the North Sea Summit last year in Ostend, we have decided to work together to ensure that our data cables, oil and gas pipelines and windmill parks will be secured at the same level. In addition, we are going to structure the reporting of incidents on a collective and secured platform in which Belgium is investing 1 million euro. The participants of this Joint Declaration will work closely with relevant bodies and institutions such as Nota and EU. Together we can make a difference and protect our critical infrastructure at sea."

Mark Harbers, Dutch minister of Infrastructure and Water management: "The North Sea is of vital importance for our future energy security, and this security can only be achieved if we work together. We are already collaborating with our neighboring countries, and this declaration is a good next step towards reaching our goals."

Tobias Lindner, Minister of State at the German Federal Foreign Office: "With its many ports and terminals, subsea pipelines and cables, as well as offshore wind farms, the North Sea is one of the areas

with the highest density of maritime infrastructure. Accordingly, it is becoming increasingly vital to securely provide Europe with sustainable energy. This makes it all the more important that we cooperate more closely than ever with our neighbouring countries in order to protect critical infrastructure across borders. With this declaration, we have taken an important step toward further deepening our close cooperation in this effort, which we are also driving forward within the EU and NATO.”

Terje Aasland, Norwegian Minister of Energy: “Together with our neighbours around the North Sea basin, we share a common interest to safeguard our critical infrastructure. This is crucial both in terms of energy security and resilience, and to ensure the safety of those who work offshore. The collaboration of signing this Joint Declaration is a necessary foundation for maintaining overall security and strong evidence of our shared interests. Together, we are stronger.”

Andrew Bowie, UK Minister for Nuclear and Renewables: “The North Sea is the powerhouse driving Europe’s renewable and net zero ambitions, helping to bolster energy security on the continent. So, it’s crucial we protect its critical energy infrastructure now and in the future. Strengthening ties with our key northern European neighbours as we have today will do just that, ensuring the infrastructure is resilient against those who may seek to threaten or disrupt it.”

Lars Aagaard, Danish Minister for Climate Energy and Utilities: “The North Sea has the potential to become the cradle of a renewable and secure energy supply in Europe, while supporting the road to a fossil free future. In order to utilize this opportunity, we must stand united and coordinated in our efforts to protect critical infrastructure across borders. This understanding is an important step in that direction.”

