Dear Minister, Parliament member Dovile Sakaliene, dear Turid Heiberg, dear experts from the Nordic and Baltic countries, and also from St.Petersburg,

The Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) places a very high priority on efforts to fight human trafficking, and has since 2001 actively supported the coordinated and effective regional collaboration in partnerships with international organizations, such CBSS, IOM, Swedish Institute, WHO, ILO, and main stakeholders in the Baltic and Nordic countries, such as national rapporteurs and national coordinators and other experienced local actors.

The particular focus has been on knowledge sharing and competence building in identification of victims and their protection, also on exchanging good practices of prevention in the communities in the Nordic- Baltic region, also North West Russia.

The aim of previously NCM supported projects was to strengthen the regional operational cooperation and networking through joint multi-disciplinary training events for judicial, law enforcement, social authorities , also NGOs, researchers, and politicians.

The Baltic countries have during the last almost twenty years built up national machineries and elaborated effective action plans to respond to the local circumstances and needs at the local level to combat human trafficking. The authorities and national coordinators continue adjusting legal acts, and develop new models of cross-institutional cooperation, help municipalities by consulting how design victim support systems locally, for both children, women, men, and they stimulate close coordination of local partners which is essential for better protection of victims in the municipalities.

The Nordic Council of Ministers support actions to design a healthier and safer environment for children and young people.

The NCM strategy for children and youth 2016-2918 emphasize the urgency to tackle the following issues of children and young people:

* To help children in migration, including unaccompanied refugee children, as well victims of human trafficking
* Prevent marginalization of vulnerable children and young people
* Improve mental health of children and adolescents
* Cooperate with civil society in the work with children and young people and develop help models by listening to children and including their views

NCM Offices in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania have been closely cooperating among themselves and with NCM secretariat in Copenhagen, in elaborating of regionally important projects by engaging the international organisations and based on the needs of national stakeholders.

**I would like to highlight a few currently running projects from the last NCM programme 2015-18**, the results of which, I hope, would contribute to sustainable national efforts and higher awareness in the civil societies in the Baltic countries.

**The project “Platform for Network and Knowledge Exchange” 2016-2018** is coordinated by the Estonian NCM Office which encompasses 4 knowledge forums.

One of them is for journalists’ competence building – NB seminar Media on Human Trafficking took place in October in Vilnius where the N-B-Ru journalists and experts of law enforcement and social workers discussed their cooperation in reporting on criminal cases of human trafficking to the society, also methods of media when covering complex topics of human trafficking in order to raise the higher awareness in societies without harming the victims and investigations.

**Out 8 NCM supported projects 2015-2018,** I would like to particularly emphasize, to my judgement, very important projects , one of them **“Strengthening the role of municipalities in the work against trafficking in human beings”**, and the other one “**Good practices in identification and referral of children at risk of exploitation and trafficking of children”,** both implemented by CBSS.

My special thanks go to Turid Heiberg and the partners in Nordic and Baltic countries for their full dedication in successfully coordinating the project activities.

It is a great pleasure to meet so many devoted experts from Lithuania, Latvia, the Nordic countries.

Regional cooperation about combatting human trafficking will remain on the Nordic agenda. Various NCM financial instruments could be used to support your efforts, I will mention a few - such as Mobility Program for Public administration, NGO cooperation programs, Nordic chairmanship programs.

I wish you all fruitful discussions and active networking for the development of new cross border or local initiatives on THB.

Vida Gintautaite

Adviser

Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Lithuania