

# EBRD2026: EBRD pledges continued support for Ukraine, Middle East as global turbulence deepens

By IntelliNews June 6, 2026



EBRD president Odile Renaud-Basso addresses the development bank's annual meeting in Riga.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) will continue scaling up support for economies affected by conflict, including Ukraine and countries across the Middle East, as global instability, trade disruptions and geopolitical tensions create new challenges for development, EBRD president Odile Renaud-Basso said on June 5.

Addressing the bank's annual meeting in Riga, Renaud-Basso said helping countries respond to conflict and economic crises remained the institution's foremost priority, pointing to the EBRD's role in Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion and its plans to support economies affected by turmoil in the Middle East.

"When other lenders pull back, we scale up, as we have done in Ukraine," she said. "While safeguarding our financial strengths and carefully managing risk, we continue to invest."

The EBRD plans to support economic activity in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and the West Bank and Gaza, as well as neighbouring countries affected by conflict. The bank will provide liquidity to businesses and state-owned enterprises and help stabilise financial sectors, while laying the foundations for long-term recovery and growth.

The approach mirrors its work in Ukraine, which Renaud-Basso described as remaining "at the core of what we do".

"We are its number one institutional investor," she said. The EBRD has deployed €10bn in Ukraine since the start of Russia's invasion, helping nearly 50,000 firms affected by the war and supporting energy security and infrastructure projects that have benefited more than 22mn Ukrainians.

"We will be at the forefront of international efforts to rebuild the country when the time comes," she said. "And it will."

Renaud-Basso warned that the world had entered a period of heightened turbulence, citing energy market disruptions, rising inflation and interest rates, tightening government finances and the growing impact of artificial intelligence.

"This one started in the energy sector but is already hurting the global economy," she said of the latest shock affecting international markets. "Its scale, scope and speed underline how volatile our world has become."

She also stressed the importance of international cooperation at a time when development aid is declining and sovereign debt burdens are increasing. The bank recently launched its first significant risk-transfer transaction, allowing it to share investments and risks with institutional investors such as pension funds and insurers.

Looking beyond immediate crises, Renaud-Basso highlighted opportunities in Central Asia and the Caucasus, particularly through the Middle Corridor trade route linking Asia and Europe, as well as investments in renewable energy, digitalisation and supply-chain diversification.

## EBRD2026: EBRD, EU expand InvestEU support with €478mn in new guarantees

By IntelliNews June 6, 2026



The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Union will increase support for sustainable infrastructure, green investment and digitalisation projects across EU economies where the lender operates, the two institutions announced on June 5.

Speaking at the EBRD's Annual Meeting and Business Forum in Riga, the partners said they would expand InvestEU guarantees by up to €478.4mn, alongside €11.4mn in funding for advisory activities.

The additional guarantees will enable the EBRD to finance higher-risk projects that may otherwise struggle to secure commercial funding, while advisory support will help prepare and implement eligible investments through technical and legal assistance.

The EBRD is among the largest partners in the EU's InvestEU programme and has already deployed more than €470mn in guarantees, supporting projects worth over €5bn across sectors including energy, transport, municipal infrastructure, manufacturing, agribusiness and natural resources.

"We are delighted to further expand our cooperation with the European Union – a key partner and donor – in our EU countries of operation, especially as we meet in Riga for our Annual Meeting," EBRD president Odile Renaud-Basso said.

"This is yet another very concrete example of our fruitful partnership, which mobilises investment in innovative ways and helps businesses to access vital finance," she added.

European Commissioner for Economy and Productivity, and Implementation and Simplification Valdis Dombrovskis said the agreement demonstrated how EU budget resources could be used to attract investment into strategic sectors.

"By reinforcing EBRD with up to €478.4mn in additional guarantees and €11.4mn in advisory support, we will help finance higher-risk projects in sustainable infrastructure, the green economy, digitalisation, innovation, research and support for SMEs," Dombrovskis said.

He added that recent reforms to the InvestEU framework would make the programme "more efficient, flexible, and easier to use" while supporting Europe's competitiveness, resilience and clean transition.

## Latvia raises €1bn through sustainable bond issue

By IntelliNews Pro June 5, 2026

Latvia has raised €1bn on international financial markets through a new sustainable bond issue, attracting strong investor interest and reinforcing the country's commitment to long-term environmental and social development goals, Latvia's public broadcaster *LSM.lt* reported on June 5.

The seven-year government bonds were issued by Latvia's State Treasury on 3 June, carrying a yield of 3.525% and a fixed coupon rate of 3.5%.

The successful bond sale comes amid continued efforts by Latvia and other European countries to diversify funding sources for green and social projects while maintaining access to international capital markets on competitive terms.

According to the State Treasury, the issue marks the country's second sovereign sustainable bond offering and forms part of Latvia's broader strategy to support climate neutrality, sustainable growth and social inclusion.

Investor demand significantly exceeded expectations, with orders topping €2.4bn. More than 70 institutional investors, primarily European asset managers, participated in the offering, *LSM.lv* said.

The proceeds will be allocated in line with Latvia's updated Sustainable Bond Framework, approved in May this year. Funding will support a range of government initiatives, including environmentally friendly transport projects, biodiversity protection, pollution reduction, social inclusion programmes and measures aimed at reducing inequality.

The Treasury said the bond issue demonstrates Latvia's continued commitment to achieving climate neutrality by 2050 while fostering a sustainable and socially inclusive economy.

Latvia entered the sustainable bond market for the first time in December 2024, when it raised €600mn through a six-year bond issue. The latest offering significantly expands the country's sustainable financing programme and reflects growing investor appetite for environmental, social and governance-focused investments.

The transaction was coordinated by French banking groups BNP Paribas and Credit Agricole CIB, which acted as lead managers for the issue, *LSM.lv* said.

## **Estonian fintech Wallester secures UK licence to accelerate expansion**

**By IntelliNews Pro June 5, 2026**

Estonian-founded fintech company Wallester has secured authorisation from the UK's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), paving the way for a significant expansion into one of the world's largest financial markets, the company announced on its website *wallester.com* on June 4.

The approval grants Wallester UK Electronic Money Institution status, allowing the company to provide regulated payment and financial services to businesses across the United Kingdom. The move represents a major milestone in Wallester's international growth strategy and strengthens its position as a rapidly expanding provider of fintech infrastructure.

Headquartered in London's Hanover Square, Wallester UK will focus on delivering embedded finance and payment solutions to small and medium-sized enterprises as well as large corporate clients. Its services combine card issuing, payment processing and expense management through a single technology platform.

The UK expansion follows a period of rapid growth for the company across Europe. Earlier this year, Wallester topped the Financial Times and Statista FT1000 ranking as Europe's fastest-growing fintech company, recording a compound annual growth rate of nearly 179% during the assessment period.

The British operation is led by Chief Executive Officer Julian Brand and Chief Revenue Officer Anna Maxim, supported by a management team with expertise in compliance, operations and strategic partnerships.

Wallester plans to focus on two flagship products in the UK market: Wallester Business, a corporate expense management platform, and Wallester White-Label, an embedded finance solution that enables businesses and regulated partners to launch customised payment card programmes.

## Lithuanian president and PM back embattled foreign minister

By IntelliNews Pro June 5, 2026

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda and Prime Minister Inga Ruginienė have publicly reaffirmed their support for Foreign Minister Kestutis Budrys amid mounting speculation about his future in the government, independent Lithuanian news agency *BNS* and, subsequently, public broadcaster *LRT.lt* reported on June 4.

As reported by *IntelliNews*, Budrys has drawn criticism over remarks made in an interview with the Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, in which he argued that Nato should demonstrate its ability to neutralise Russian military assets in Kaliningrad, the heavily militarised Russian exclave between Lithuania and Poland.

Notably, Remigijus Zemaitytis, leader of the radical right Nemunas Dawn party, accused the Foreign Ministry of failing to adequately implement government policy and questioned coordination within the coalition.

Coalition's Social Democratic Party chairman Mindaugas Sinkevicius has also expressed reservations about the minister's political approach, although he stressed that no formal decisions regarding Budrys' position have been made.

Speaking to reporters, Nauseda dismissed suggestions that Budrys could be removed from office, arguing that criticism directed at the minister lacked any clear factual basis.

"To speak now about one specific minister, especially when no concrete, tangible accusations are presented, is not very responsible and not very serious," the president said, *BNS* and *LRT.lt* reported.

Budrys, who took office in late 2024, previously served as Nauseda's national security adviser and has held senior positions in Lithuania's security and intelligence institutions. The president suggested that the minister's popularity may partly explain why he has become a target of political debate.

Prime Minister Ruginiene also voiced confidence in Budrys, warning that ongoing public speculation could damage both Lithuania's international standing and broader security interests.

"There are various speculations in the public sphere that I would prefer not to see – both for the sake of ensuring security and for our international image," she said. "But I have said it more than once and my opinion has not changed: I trust Foreign Minister Kestutis Budrys and I believe he is doing a good job," *BNS* and *LRT.lt* reported.

The discussion comes ahead of a meeting of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party council, where coalition issues are expected to feature prominently.

## **Estonia's Sunly and Rolls-Royce strike Baltics' largest private battery storage deal**

**By IntelliNews Pro June 5, 2026**

Estonian renewable energy developer Sunly and Rolls-Royce Power Systems signed an agreement to build four large-scale battery energy storage systems in Latvia, creating what the companies describe as the largest battery storage project undertaken by a privately owned



company in the Baltic states, Sunly announced on June 4.

The investment comes at a significant moment for the Baltic energy sector. Following the region's synchronisation with the European electricity network and its disconnection from the Russian grid, demand for balancing and frequency-control

services has increased sharply.

The facilities will have a combined storage capacity of 490 MWh and form part of a wider regional partnership that could eventually reach 790 MWh, including a planned project in Estonia.

The agreement was announced during the opening of Sunly's new solar park in Valmiera, one of Latvia's first hybrid renewable energy sites combining solar generation and battery storage. The first battery installation in Valmiera is expected to enter operation in early 2027, with three additional projects scheduled to follow later that year.

Under the agreement, Rolls-Royce will act as the main contractor, overseeing design, equipment supply, construction and commissioning. The company will deploy its mtu EnergyPack battery systems and energy management software, designed to help balance electricity supply and demand while supporting grid stability.

Rolls-Royce said the battery systems would play an important role in supporting renewable energy integration and strengthening regional energy security.

The companies have also signed a memorandum of understanding covering a further 300 MWh battery storage project in Risti, Estonia.

"Our aim is to build an energy system that works for people, not just when the sun shines. By combining solar generation and battery storage, we can produce energy when conditions are right and deliver it when it is needed, making renewable energy more reliable and less dependent on weather conditions. Co-locating generation, storage, and consumers like data centres in one place is how renewable energy becomes truly efficient. Latvia is the start. Estonia is next. And we have the right partner to get there," said Lepasepp.

# EBRD backs major biomethane project in Latvia with €26m loan

By IntelliNews Pro June 5, 2026

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is providing a €26mn loan to support the expansion of biomethane production in Latvia, marking a significant step in the country's drive towards greater energy independence and lower carbon emissions, EBRD announced on its website *ebrd.com* on June 4.

The fuel is increasingly viewed as an important component of Europe's efforts to diversify energy supplies and strengthen resilience.

The financing will enable Netherlands-based HoSt Group, through its Latvian subsidiary Next Biogas, to acquire and convert an existing biogas facility in Ledurga into a large-scale biomethane production plant. Once operational, the facility is expected to produce around 80,000 MWh of renewable gas annually, making it one of the largest biomethane plants in Latvia.

The renewable fuel will be injected into the national gas grid for domestic consumption and export across Europe. The production process will also capture biogenic CO<sub>2</sub>, creating an additional sustainable product while maintaining a highly carbon-neutral operating cycle.

Speaking at the EBRD's 2026 Annual Meeting in Riga, EBRD President Odile Renaud-Basso highlighted the project's strategic importance.

"We are pleased to support HoSt Group in expanding biomethane production and strengthening the energy market in Latvia and the wider Baltic region. This project boosts energy security while accelerating the low carbon transition, especially for hard to abate sectors."

HoSt Group Chief Financial Officer Arthur Vlaanderen said the investment would accelerate the company's strategy of developing, owning and operating renewable energy infrastructure across Europe.

European Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis described the project as an important contribution to the development of Latvia's emerging biomethane market, helping replace imported natural gas with locally produced low-carbon fuel in line with EU energy and decarbonisation goals.

The EBRD loan is backed by a guarantee from the European Union's InvestEU programme. The bank has invested more than €1.3bn in Latvia to date, focusing on renewable energy, innovation and sustainable economic development.

# Trump praises Lithuania's support for Hormuz mission

By IntelliNews Pro June 5, 2026

US President Donald Trump has thanked Lithuania for its willingness to contribute to international efforts aimed at safeguarding freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, underlining the importance Washington places on Vilnius' support, independent Lithuanian news agency *BNS* and, subsequently, public broadcaster *LRT.lt* reported on June 5.

*As reported by IntelliNews*, Lithuania has considered its contribution to the US-led operation in the strait.

The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints, carrying a significant share of global energy exports and remaining a focal point of international security efforts.

In a letter sent to President Gitanas Nauseda, Trump expressed appreciation for Lithuania's readiness to deploy personnel to the strategically vital waterway. According to the Lithuanian President's Office, the US leader said the offer to send troops "means a great deal to him".

The message arrives as Lithuania moves forward with plans to participate in multinational maritime security operations in the Gulf region. In May, the State Defence Council approved the deployment of up to 40 military and civilian specialists to support mine-clearing activities designed to ensure the safe passage of commercial shipping through the strait. The proposal is currently being considered by the Seimas under an expedited procedure, *BNS* and *LRT.lt* reported.

Trump also used the letter to highlight the close relationship between the two countries, describing Lithuania as a dependable friend and partner of the United States. He noted that Lithuania's willingness to host American forces and provide opportunities for their permanent deployment demonstrates a partnership that has endured for more than a century.

The correspondence reached the President's Office shortly after the completion of a rotation of US troops stationed in Lithuania, *BNS* and *LRT.lt* reported.

As reported by *IntelliNews*, around one thousand troops have left Lithuania.

However, defence minister Robertas Kaunas says that Lithuania is at the forefront of efforts to attract a stronger American military presence in the region.

Speaking to reporters on June 5, Kaunas stressed that Eastern European countries share a common interest in maintaining close defence ties with Washington and would work collectively to demonstrate the region's strategic value to the United States.

"I believe that together, as a region, we will show that the best place for the United States in Europe is specifically the Eastern European part," Kaunas said, *BNS* and *LRT.lt* reported.

The minister argued that the security challenges facing Nato's eastern flank make the region particularly important for the deployment of US forces. He added that countries in the area are actively strengthening military infrastructure and expanding cooperation with American allies.

At the same time, Kaunas suggested Lithuania currently holds a leading position among regional partners seeking a larger US military footprint.

"If we were to call it a rat race, then Lithuania is leading," he said, *BNS* and *LRT.lt* reported.

## Five new business hubs will open across Lithuania

By IntelliNews Pro June 4, 2026

Lithuania is set to expand its regional business support network with the launch of five new active business hubs this year, providing entrepreneurs and startups with access to mentoring, workspace and development opportunities, the Ministry of Economy and Innovation announced on its website *eimin.lrv.lt* on June 4.

The new centres, operating under the "Spieciai" initiative, will open in Mazeikiai, Sakiai, Lazdijai, Salcininkai and Anyksčiai. The expansion will create 25 new workstations for businesses and increase the nationwide network to 20 locations by the end of the year.

The initiative forms part of broader efforts to encourage economic activity outside the country's largest cities and strengthen regional innovation ecosystems.

Economy and Innovation Minister Edvinas Griksas said the project reflects the goals of Lithuania's economic transformation strategy by helping young companies grow and attract investment in smaller towns and cities.

"New 'Spiečiai' are one of the practical examples of Lithuania's economic transformation plan '3i', demonstrating how businesses can successfully grow in the regions. We allocated funding so that 'Spiečiai' would encourage the expansion of young companies, foster innovation and help attract more investment," he said.

According to the ministry, the centres will offer mentoring, training and networking opportunities while helping businesses gain easier access to support services and information.

Lithuania currently has 15 operational "Spiečiai" centres across the country, offering a combined 97 computer-equipped workstations for entrepreneurs and small businesses.

On June 1, the ministry allocated €3mn to the public institution "Invest Lithuania" to accelerate the search and attraction of high added value foreign direct investments to the Central and Western Lithuania region. The investments will be directed toward attracting new businesses and creating highly skilled jobs in the regions.

## **Baltic investors commit €8.8mn to Riga development as bond issue oversubscribed**

By IntelliNews Pro June 4, 2026

Latvia's PN Project secured €8.8mn from Baltic investors after demand for its latest bond offering substantially exceeded the planned issue size, underscoring continued confidence in the Preses Nama Kvartals development in Riga, *LETA*, Latvia's national news agency, and *BNS*, a pan-Baltic news agency, reported on June 4.

It demonstrates the strength of investor demand and the cross-Baltic appetite for real estate-backed bonds.

The company had initially sought to raise €5mn under the tenth tranche of its bond programme. However, investor orders surpassed the target by €3.8mn, resulting in the offering being oversubscribed by 76%.

A total of 682 retail and institutional investors from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia participated in the issue. Lithuanian investors accounted for nearly two-thirds of the capital raised, while retail buyers contributed 65% of the total amount invested.

The offering also attracted support from two Baltic banks investing from their own balance sheets, as well as several corporate bond funds.

According to project representatives, investor appetite remained strong despite the bonds carrying a 9% annual yield, compared with 9.5% in the previous issue.

The latest fundraising brings the total amount raised through the bond programme to €62.7mn, representing 83.6% of the planned financing target.

The proceeds will support interior fit-out works, technical infrastructure installation and working capital requirements as construction advances. Structural works on the project's first phase have already been completed, with landscaping scheduled to begin shortly.

The first stage of Preses Nama Kvartals will deliver a Class A office building offering around 27,700 square metres of leasable space and capacity for up to 2,500 employees. The project is targeting BREEAM Excellent certification, while future phases are expected to include residential, hospitality, educational and healthcare facilities.

The development is being led by Lords LB Asset Management, whose assets under management exceeded €1.423bn at the end of 2025, *LETA* and *BNS* said.

## Latvian Green Point posts 31% turnover growth amid recycling reforms

By IntelliNews Pro June 4, 2026

Latvian producer responsibility organisation Latvijas Zalais Punkts reported a 31% increase in turnover last year, driven by rising recycling obligations and higher environmental compliance costs for businesses, *LETA*, Latvia's national news agency, reported on June 4.

The company helps producers comply with recycling and waste-management obligations. A 31% jump in revenue suggests that environmental compliance is becoming a larger and more expensive part of doing business.

The company posted revenue of €24.4mn in 2025, up from €18.6mn a year earlier, according to financial information published by *Firmas.lv*. Net profit, however, fell by 31% to €3.8mn.

Management said the growth in revenue was largely linked to stricter European Union and national requirements aimed at increasing recycling rates and reducing landfill waste. Higher natural resource tax payments on non-recycled plastic packaging and other regulatory costs also contributed to increased service prices for clients.

Company data showed mixed trends across product categories. Sales of packaging, electronic equipment and tobacco products with filters declined slightly during the year, while the volume of textile products placed on the market increased.

Despite lower profitability, the organisation said it intends to continue expanding waste collection and recycling activities. One of its main priorities will be increasing the volume of sorted waste collected and processed, while broadening the network for collecting electrical and electronic equipment waste and used batteries.

The expansion will be carried out in cooperation with waste management company Eco Baltia Vide, with a focus on improving access to collection services for both households and corporate clients.

The latest results follow a strong performance in the previous year. In 2024, the company recorded turnover of €18.6mn, an increase of nearly 47% compared with 2023, while profit rose more than 92% to €5.5mn.

The company has share capital of €1.084mn and is wholly owned by Eco Baltia Vide, *LETA* said.

## Italian contractor ordered to pay €213,000 in latest Rail Baltica debt case

By IntelliNews Pro June 4, 2026

Italian construction group Rizzani de Eccher lost another court dispute in Lithuania over unpaid obligations linked to the Rail Baltica project, adding to mounting pressure on the contractor as authorities consider the future of its contract, *BNS*, a pan-Baltic news agency, reported on June 4.

The Vilnius Regional Court ruled on May 28 that the company must pay €213,000 to Vilnius-based equipment rental provider Renta Pumps for leased pumping equipment used during construction works.

Judges rejected the contractor's attempt to challenge an earlier decision, finding no grounds to overturn the ruling.

"There is no factual or legal basis to overturn the preliminary decision of the Vilnius Regional Court based on the defendant's arguments; therefore, the court's decision remains unchanged," the court said, *BNS* reported.

According to Renta Pumps, the Italian firm had rented equipment and made partial payments but failed to settle the remaining balance, which the contractor had previously acknowledged.

Rizzani argued that the claim had been brought against its Lithuanian branch rather than the parent company and therefore targeted the wrong legal entity. The company also maintained that the dispute should be examined in Italy as part of ongoing restructuring proceedings. The court dismissed both arguments.

The ruling is the latest in a series of legal setbacks for the contractor. Several Lithuanian subcontractors have already secured court decisions covering roughly €1.1mn in unpaid claims. Among the companies that have successfully pursued payments are Sarens, Heidelberg Materials, Lietuva Betonai and Tetras, *BNS* reported.

The dispute comes at a sensitive stage for one of the most significant infrastructure projects in the Baltic region. Rizzani de Eccher was awarded a €77.4mn contract in 2022 to construct what is expected to become the longest Rail Baltica bridge in the Baltic states.

Around 60% of the project has been completed, but uncertainty remains over the contractor's future involvement. Lithuanian Railways Infra is currently assessing whether to terminate the contract, *BNS* said.

As reported by *IntelliNews*, the costs of the Rail Baltica projects are expected to balloon up to €23bn.

## Rail Baltica construction costs in Latvia far exceed Estonia and Lithuania

By IntelliNews Pro June 4, 2026

Latvia is facing mounting questions over the cost of Rail Baltica after figures revealed that construction of part of the project's main line is substantially more expensive than comparable sections in Estonia and Lithuania, Estonia's national broadcaster *ERR.ee* reported on June 4.

According to data presented by Rail Baltica coordinator RB Rail, embankment construction on the Misa–Latvia border section south of Riga is expected to cost around €16.3mn per kilometre. The figure is more than twice Estonia's comparable cost level and about 66% higher than in Lithuania.

The findings come as Latvia continues to grapple with funding constraints for the flagship European rail project. Government documents show that €603mn is currently available for main line construction works from a total budget of just under €700mn, which also covers supervision and project management costs.

As reported by *IntelliNews*, the costs of the Rail Baltica projects are expected to balloon up to €23bn.

RB Rail chief executive Matiss Paegle said the discrepancy was largely linked to the price of construction materials included in the contract.

"It is clear that the unit prices for gravel, soil and other foundation materials in the contract signed by Latvia are very high and the state cannot afford it," Paegle told Latvian public broadcaster *LSM*, *ERR.ee* reported.

Based on current estimates, the available funding would allow for the construction of approximately 52.7 kilometres of railway embankment, implying an average cost of around €11.45mn per kilometre before tracks, signalling systems and stations are added.

Paegle outlined two possible paths forward. One option would involve redesigning the southern section of the route, a process expected to take around two years and cost roughly €8mn. However, such changes could potentially reduce overall project costs by between €100mn and €200mn.

The alternative would be to renegotiate with E.R.B. Rail JV, the consortium responsible for construction, in an effort to secure lower prices for key materials and achieve similar savings without delaying the project.

The consortium comprises France's Eiffage Genie Civil, Poland's Budimex and Italy's Rizzani de Eccher.

The contract, signed in late 2023, covers around 200 kilometres of Rail Baltica infrastructure outside Riga, including earthworks, bridges, tunnels, viaducts, utility relocations and track installation.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have committed to completing Rail Baltica by 2030, *ERR.ee* reported.

## Bodies of three Latvian climbers brought down from Alaska's Denali mountain

By IntelliNews Pro June 4, 2026

The bodies of three Latvian climbers who died on Alaska's Denali Mountain last week have been recovered and transported from the mountain, Latvian officials confirmed on June 4, Latvia's national broadcaster *LSM.lv* reported on June 4.

Latvian citizens, Inese Puceka, Vija Olte and Renars Kunigs-Salaks, were brought down from Denali, also known as Mount McKinley, after poor weather conditions delayed recovery efforts for several days.

The climbers were subsequently transferred to Anchorage, where they were taken to the Medical Examiner's Office before arrangements were made for their return to Latvia.

The recovery operation marked the latest stage in efforts following last week's tragedy on North America's highest peak, which claimed the lives of three members of the Latvian mountaineering team.

Valdis Purins, the expedition leader, remains in Anchorage to oversee administrative procedures related to the incident and to support fellow climber Martins Bilzens, who survived but was injured during the expedition.

Bilzens continues to receive treatment at a hospital in Anchorage. According to reports, the medical facility has extensive experience in treating injuries sustained in mountain environments, *LSM.lv* reported.

The circumstances surrounding the deaths have not been detailed further, but authorities have indicated that adverse weather conditions complicated recovery operations and dictated the timetable for retrieving the climbers from the mountain.

The incident has drawn widespread attention in Latvia's mountaineering community, with the recovery effort involving close coordination between local authorities, rescue teams and Latvian diplomatic representatives in the United States.

The Latvian Embassy in Washington confirmed that the bodies had been successfully evacuated from the mountain and transported for further procedures before repatriation.

Denali, standing at 6,190 metres, is the highest mountain in North America and is regarded as one of the continent's most demanding climbing destinations due to its extreme weather conditions and challenging terrain, *LSM.lv* reported.

## Brussels urges Lithuania to overhaul taxes to fund rising spending needs

By IntelliNews Pro June 4, 2026

Lithuania could unlock additional budget revenue through a series of tax reforms while preserving fiscal stability, according to new recommendations from the European Commission, independent Lithuanian news agency *BNS* and, subsequently, public broadcaster *LRT.lt* reported on June 4.

In its latest assessment, the Commission said the country faces growing demands on public finances as spending pressures rise in defence, healthcare and social protection. It argued that reforms to property and environmental taxation, alongside a review of preferential tax arrangements, could help generate extra income for the state.

"These could include reforms of property and environmental taxation, the streamlining of special tax regimes, measures to combat the shadow economy and the gradual removal of fossil fuel subsidies," the Commission said in its country-specific recommendations published on June 3, *BNS* and *LRT* reported.

Brussels also called for stronger efforts to curb undeclared economic activity and a phased withdrawal of support measures linked to fossil fuels.

Despite these recommendations, the Commission described Lithuania's economy as resilient. Economic output is expected to expand by 3% in 2026 before moderating to 2.1% in 2027.

The report highlighted the rapid development of the country's venture capital market, advances in renewable energy projects and the benefits of investments financed through the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility. According to the Commission, the programme could play a key role in

supporting further structural reforms.

To improve competitiveness, Lithuania was encouraged to deepen capital markets, increase the availability of investment funding and strengthen cooperation between businesses, research institutions and local authorities.

The Commission also recommended continued investment in electricity networks, energy-efficiency upgrades, public transport and electrification projects, arguing that such measures would improve energy security and help contain living costs.

In social policy, the report pointed to persistent challenges. Healthcare outcomes remain below the EU average, with shortages of services outside major cities contributing to high levels of preventable deaths. Education disparities between urban and rural areas also remain significant despite recent reforms.

The Commission further warned that poverty and social exclusion continue to affect parts of the country disproportionately. At the same time, Lithuania's proximity to Russia and wider geopolitical tensions are placing additional economic, social and security pressures on the country and the EU's eastern flank, *BNS* and *LRT* reported.

## Estonia leaves €1.75bn of state budget unspent in 2025

By IntelliNews Pro June 4, 2026

Nearly €1.75bn of Estonia's €19.5bn state budget remained unused last year, according to preliminary Finance Ministry data, although the amount was significantly lower than the €2.1bn left unspent in 2024, Estonia's national broadcaster *ERR.ee* reported on June 3.

The unused sum represented around 9% of total budgeted expenditure and reflected a continued decline in unspent allocations following efforts by the government to improve spending efficiency.

According to the Ministry of Finance, around €1.2bn of the unused budget was linked to expenditure items dependent on revenue flows. Current accounting rules also include unspent portions of multi-year project budgets, including funding originally intended for use in future years.

The ministry said it plans to review the methodology used to account for revenue-dependent expenditure to provide a more accurate picture of actual budget utilisation.

Preliminary figures show that €295mn in state budget appropriations was carried forward into 2026, down 44% from a year earlier when €524mn was rolled over. In addition, Estonia recorded €379mn in capped appropriations, which can also be used in subsequent years.

Officials said the reduction in carryovers suggests recent measures aimed at limiting budget balances have been effective.

The largest decline in carryover funding was recorded by the Ministry of Education and Research, where the amount fell by €66mn. The ministry attributed the reduction to improved planning related to Estonia's transition to Estonian-language education.

The Ministry of Defence posted the second-largest decrease, with carryovers falling by €58mn. Nevertheless, it transferred the largest absolute amount into 2026 at €44mn, although this represented less than 3% of its €1.36bn budget.

In proportional terms, the largest shares of unused funding were recorded by the Riigikogu, where 22% of the budget was carried over, followed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications at 14% and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at 13%, *ERR.ee* reported.

## Latvia records 7.5% fall in foreign tourist numbers in first quarter

By IntelliNews Pro June 4, 2026

Latvia saw a sharp decline in foreign visitor numbers during the first quarter of 2026, with overnight stays by international tourists falling by 7.5% compared with the same period a year earlier, according to the latest data from Eurostat, Latvia's national broadcaster *LSM.lv* reported on June 3.

The figures come amid growing concerns that regional security tensions and recent drone-related incidents could be affecting travel demand across the Baltic states. However, the statistics cover the period before the most recent drone alerts reported in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

Across the European Union, tourism continued to grow during the first three months of the year. Tourist accommodation establishments recorded 471.1 million overnight stays, up 3.4% from the first quarter of 2025.

Latvia's overall performance lagged the EU average, with total overnight stays declining by 3%. The country recorded almost 24,000 fewer overnight stays than during the corresponding period last year.

Monthly data showed a gradual deterioration in visitor numbers. Overnight stays fell by 0.3% in January, followed by a 5.3% decline in February and a further 3.2% drop in March.

The broader Baltic picture was mixed. Lithuania registered the steepest decline in total overnight stays across the EU, with a drop of 12.9%, while Estonia bucked the regional trend, posting growth of 7.3%.

The figures also suggest that concerns about foreign tourists avoiding the Baltic region may not fully explain recent trends. Lithuania, despite recording the bloc's largest overall decline in overnight stays, saw one of the strongest increases in foreign visitor numbers, with international tourist stays rising by 24.1%.

Ireland recorded the highest growth in foreign tourist overnight stays among EU member states at 42.3%, followed by Lithuania and Slovakia, where the increase reached 15.4%.

Latvia, meanwhile, recorded the largest decline in foreign visitor numbers in the European Union. The 7.5% drop was followed by Bulgaria, where foreign tourist stays fell by 4.3%, and Belgium, which registered a decline of 4%.

Domestic tourism provided some support for Latvia's tourism sector, with overnight stays by local travellers increasing by 4% year-on-year, partially offsetting weaker demand from international visitors, *LSM.lv* said.

## Lithuania dismisses Russian allegations over Soviet war graves

By IntelliNews Pro June 3, 2026

Lithuania strongly rejected Russian accusations that it is disrespecting the remains of Soviet soldiers buried on its territory, describing the claims as unfounded and politically motivated, independent Lithuanian news agency *BNS* and, subsequently, public broadcaster *LRT.lt* reported on June 3.

The dispute follows a decision by the municipality of Elektrenai to relocate the remains of more than 100 Soviet troops from a burial site in Vievis, central Lithuania. In response, Russia accused Vilnius of dishonouring the memory of Red Army soldiers and submitted an official diplomatic protest.

Lithuania's Foreign Ministry dismissed the allegations, arguing that Moscow was deliberately misrepresenting events to damage the country's international reputation.

"The repeated accusations against our country regarding the reburial of Soviet Union soldiers who died in Lithuania during World War II are false and absurd," the ministry said, *BNS* and *LRT.It* reported.

According to Lithuanian officials, the relocation of remains is being carried out following archaeological investigations and in line with established procedures. Similar work has already taken place in Siauliai, where Soviet-era burials were exhumed and transferred to new locations after research was completed.

The ministry pointed to assessments by the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, which concluded that secondary Soviet military burials established in prominent urban locations were intended to reinforce the narrative of the Great Patriotic War promoted by the Soviet Union and later adopted by modern Russia.

As a result, authorities have opted to move the remains from town centres to local cemeteries while ensuring respectful reburial within the same communities, *BNS* and *LRT.It* reported.

Vilnius also accused Moscow of double standards. During discussions with Russian officials, Lithuanian diplomat Jolanta Tubaitė raised concerns about the condition of several Lithuanian heritage monuments located in Russia. These include memorials dedicated to Archbishop Mėcislovas Reinys, political prisoners and deportees in Tomsk, and writer Kristijonas Donelaitis. Lithuania has called on Russia to restore and protect the sites.

Russia has argued that the desecration of military graves is a criminal offence under its legislation and has suggested that legal action could be taken against Lithuanian citizens involved in the relocations. Lithuanian officials rejected the warning, describing it as hypocritical and accusing Moscow of disregarding international legal principles while criticising others, *BNS* and *LRT.It* reported.

# Lithuania joins talks on potential expansion of US nuclear presence in Europe

By IntelliNews Pro June 3, 2026

Lithuania is participating in allied discussions on the possible expansion of US nuclear-related capabilities across Europe, Defence Minister Robertas Kaunas confirmed, amid growing debate over Nato's future deterrence posture, independent Lithuanian news agency *BNS* and, subsequently, public broadcaster *LRT.lt* reported on June 3.

As reported by *IntelliNews*, Lithuania showed interest in France's proposal to extend its nuclear coverage to the Eastern flank.

The remarks came after the *Financial Times* reported that Washington is examining options to broaden the number of European countries involved in its nuclear deterrence framework. The newspaper, citing unnamed sources, said discussions include the possible deployment of additional dual-capable aircraft that could support nuclear missions.

According to the report, Nato members on the alliance's eastern flank – including Poland and the Baltic states – are among the countries assessing whether they could host such capabilities in the future. Any changes, however, are not expected in the near term.

Speaking in parliament Seimas on June 2, Kaunas said consultations were taking place within alliance structures, although he declined to disclose details because of their sensitive nature.

"Discussions are indeed taking place. I do not want to go into details at this point because they are classified, but discussions are ongoing and Lithuania is certainly not standing on the sidelines," Kaunas told reporters, *BNS* and *LRT.lt* reported,

Kaunas argued that nuclear capabilities remain an important component of collective defence, saying countries must continue strengthening their security and resilience in response to evolving threats.

The issue has also fuelled debate inside Lithuania. Following President Gitanas Nausėda's decision to veto amendments to legislation governing Klaipėda's seaport, political attention shifted to broader questions surrounding the country's constitutional restrictions on nuclear-related deployments.

Under Lithuania's Constitution, foreign military bases and weapons of mass destruction cannot be stationed on national territory. Any move towards hosting nuclear assets would therefore require significant legal and political changes, *BNS* and *LRT.lt* reported.

# Eritrean man to face trial over alleged migrant smuggling operation

By IntelliNews Pro June 3, 2026

Lithuanian prosecutors have sent to court a criminal case involving an Eritrean national accused of organising the illegal movement of migrants through the country, while two Ethiopian women face charges related to the use of stolen identity documents, independent Lithuanian news agency *BNS* and, subsequently, public broadcaster *LRT.lt* reported on June 3.

As reported by *IntelliNews*, Lithuania has recently tightened employment requirements for non-EU nationals amid growing calls for stricter migration controls.

The case, which will be heard by the Panevezys Regional Court, centres on an incident earlier this year when border guards stopped a coach travelling from Riga to Warsaw and uncovered an alleged attempt to reach Western Europe using fraudulent papers.

According to investigators, the 26-year-old Eritrean defendant, identified as J. M. A., is charged with arranging the unlawful transportation of foreign nationals across Lithuania's border and facilitating the use of identity documents belonging to other people.

Two Ethiopian women, both aged 26, have also been indicted for allegedly presenting documents that were not their own.

The investigation began in January when officers inspecting passengers on the international bus became suspicious of two women travelling with Greek residence permits and refugee travel documents issued to Eritrean citizens. Subsequent checks established that the women were Ethiopian nationals and that the papers had been issued to different individuals.

Authorities said both women had previously entered Latvia illegally from Belarus before being accommodated at a refugee reception centre, *BNS* and *LRT.lt* reported.

Investigators later linked the women to the Eritrean suspect, who was travelling on the same coach and is legally resident in the United Kingdom. Although the women initially denied knowing him, evidence recovered during the inquiry pointed to a connection.

Among the material examined by border guards was a record of a bank transfer found on one of the women's mobile phones showing a payment of £550 made to the suspect.

Prosecutors allege that the financial transaction formed part of a broader arrangement to facilitate travel from Belarus through Latvia and onwards to destinations in Western Europe.

The pre-trial investigation also found that one of the women had maintained contact with J. M. A. via social media over an extended period. During those exchanges, investigators believe he coordinated elements of the planned journey and provided guidance on moving across several countries while avoiding immigration controls.

The court will now determine whether the evidence is sufficient to support the charges brought against all three defendants, *BNS* and *LRT*. It reported.

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