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The Rt Hon
Wes Streeting MP
Secretary of State for Defence
The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

For more than four years, I have had the honour of serving the Estonian people as the Minister of Defence. While I sadly did not have the pleasure of meeting you since you took up your position, I have been privileged to work with your predecessors to support Ukraine and strengthen European security. These extraordinary years have required us to act with determination, speed and responsibility.

During this period, my guiding principle has been simple: we must act decisively, not hesitate. As a result, Estonia's defence spending has increased from two to more than five percent of GDP, we have significantly strengthened our military capabilities, close to doubled our armed forces; invested in ammunition, new weapons systems; developed air defence, coastal defence, indirect fire and drone capabilities and together with our Allies, established the Estonian Division.

Leadership, however, also means responsibility. Recent observations by Estonia's State Audit Office concerning the accounting of stocks within the Defence Forces and an ammunition acquisition for Ukraine, where the contractual partner failed to fulfil its obligations, have raised the question of political responsibility. While a minister does not conduct the day-to-day accounting of stocks nor negotiate procurement contracts, the minister ultimately bears responsibility for the defence sector as a whole.

I have therefore decided to take the political responsibility and resign as the Minister of Defence from next week.

I do so with a clear conscience and full confidence that we have made the right strategic choices for Estonian, European and Ukrainian security and defence.

Estonia's commitment to European and transatlantic security will remain unwavering and above all, we must continue our steadfast support for Ukraine. Ukrainians are fighting not only for their own freedom and territorial integrity, but also for the security of Europe. Europe must neither tire nor hesitate in supporting them and must continue to find ways to support the Ukrainians. Even if it comes with risks.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the UK for helping build the strong and stable defence cooperation that unites our two countries. Estonia and the UK already shared a deep and fruitful defence relationship before I took office. The armed forces of our two countries fought side-by-side in NATO's long and challenging campaign in Afghanistan, and since 2017 have cooperated closely to establish and develop the UK-led enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Estonia.

However, I believe that we have accomplished a lot over the past four years to further deepen these ties and make both of our countries more secure.

I am deeply grateful for the UK's commitment, made in the wake of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine in 2022, to assign a brigade as part of NATO's Forward Land Forces to reinforce Estonia. Actions speak louder than words, and the UK has consistently acted as a trustworthy friend when we have needed you the most.

I am thoroughly impressed by the hard work, intelligence and passion displayed by professionals working at the British MoD and Armed Forces, which has enabled our two countries to sign multiple important agreements over the past years. In 2023, we renewed our Defence Cooperation Agreement for another 10 years, reaffirming our commitment to building a safer Europe together.

My time in office has also seen the signing of three bilateral Roadmaps, which have outlined clear steps to further integrate and strengthen our defence. I am proud and thankful for the successful implementation of the first two Roadmaps and have the utmost confidence that this will continue with the current Roadmap, signed in July of this year.

I thank the UK sincerely for its cooperation, trust and friendship over these years. It has been a privilege to work alongside your predecessors in strengthening our common security. So, I wish you strength, determination and every success in carrying this responsibility forward.

Hanno Pevkur
Minister