

### **Sam Rowlands MS report following the Nordic-Baltic Prayer Breakfast**

I was invited to attend the Nordic-Baltic Prayer Breakfast series of events on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2022 in Riga. This was with a group of cross party delegation of politicians from across Europe. As outlined in the invite, the purpose of the events was to meet with political leaders, in particular from the Nordic-Baltic countries with the geo-political risks of the region in mind, to “...*strengthen our common commitment to be peacemakers and peacekeepers in Europe and beyond*”. This took place through a series of presentations, organised discussions and interactive informal meetings.

At the breakfast meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> I spend time with Latvian MPs such as Janis Grasberg, Richard Slesers, Ramona Petravica, and Ainars Slesers who outlined the challenges that Latvia faces as a country bordering Russia and its relative proximity to Ukraine, especially at a time of aggression. It was helpful to hear first hand the cultural and historical significance of the region in the current context and how the impact of the war in Ukraine is effecting citizens in the Nordic-Baltic region.

Naturally these conversations often led into the role of Wales in supporting those fleeing the war in Ukraine and the support Governments are able to provide those individuals seeking refuge. As a member of the Welsh Parliament, I was able to provide assurances of the support that many communities in my region of North Wales feel toward those in the area.



*Sam Rowlands MS with Nordic-Baltic Parliamentarians and Senedd Colleagues.*

The main speaker for the event was Antero Laukkanen, a member of the Finnish Parliament. Mr Laukkanen shared his experience both as a priest and then as a politician in the Finnish Parliament with his particular interest in social justice. It struck me there is much that we in Wales can learn from parliamentary colleagues in the Nordic region in relation to social justice and specifically the

focus on family, the structures that hold society together and the broader strength this provides to our country.

During the events we received presentations from Ukrainian refugees who were able to share their stories of fleeing the war in Ukraine. These were very emotive and outlined some of the horrors that ordinary people in the country have been and continue to endure as a result of Russia's invasion. I was able to spend some time with these refugees to share the strength of feeling that many of my residents in North Wales feel toward supporting them in their efforts.

The final presentation during the event that I was able to attend was a speech on 'faith in the public square' by Princess Maragaretha of Liechtenstein. The Princess outlined her journey to faith and how that is then expressed in her public role. In Wales we have a proud heritage of faith and a freedom to express our beliefs; the speech by the Princess re-affirmed to me the importance of maintaining and furthering the inclusive attitude held in our country.