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Address by the President of Latvia, H. E. Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, at a reception hosted by Ivar C. Hansen, Chairman of the Danish Folketing, Copenhagen, 29 March 2001

Mr. Hansen,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is always a pleasure to be visiting Latvias friends, which the people of Denmark most definitely are. We in Latvia still remember with gratitude the support that we received from Denmarks parliamentary deputies just over a decade ago, when we were seeking to regain our independence from the Soviet Union. Their first official visit to the Baltic countries as representatives of the Nordic Council in 1990, along with the foundation of the Danish Culture Institute in Riga and the Baltic Information Centre in Copenhagen, was a clear sign of Denmarks interest in our destiny.

Thankfully, Latvia now has different aspirations on its agenda, but Denmarks steadfast support has continued. Despite its relatively small size, Denmark is Latvias largest single foreign investor and the second largest provider of foreign assistance. Denmark is also among Latvias top ten trading partners, and has been actively supporting the early accession of the three Baltic countries to both the European Union and NATO.

I am very pleased that Denmark supports Latvias commitment to conclude its accession negotiations with the EU by the end of the year 2002, during Denmarks presidency of this organization.

Denmarks support has been forthcoming not only at the parliamentary and government level. The Danish public has also been among the most supportive of the European Unions expansion towards the East, according to the EUs Eurobarometer.

This affinity and friendship between Latvia and Denmark, as two small nations on the Baltic Sea, is strengthened by our shared values and common goals. As friends and as allies, we are working to turn the Baltic Sea region into one of the most dynamic, prosperous, stable and secure areas in Europe.

Parliamentarians from both of our countries will be participating in the next joint meeting of the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council in Riga this May. I sincerely hope that this meeting serves to promote the intensification of cooperative efforts in various fields between the three Baltic and five Nordic countries.

Once again, may I express my sincere thanks for the outstandingly friendly reception that I have received throughout my visit here.

I raise my glass in tribute to the lawmakers of this country, to the prosperity and happiness of the Danish people, and to the strengthening of friendly relations between Latvia and Denmark.