



## Latvijas Republikas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja Prezidenta preses dienests

Pils laukums 3, Rīga-50, LV-1900, tālr. 7092122, fakss 7320404,  
prese@president.lv, www.president.lv

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### **Address by H. E. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, to the Lithuanian Seimas, March 15, 2001**

Gerbiami Lietuvos parlamentarai!

Js ekslencijos!

Ponios ir ponai!

A jiauiu didiul garb ir labai diaugiuosi kreipdamasi Lietuvos Respublikos Seim.is kreipimasis liudija itin artimus ir draugiskus rylius, esanlius tarp dviej kaimynini valstybi ir taut,kurias vienija bendra kilm, bendras likimas ir bendri ateities tikslai.

*(Man ir liels gods un patiess prieks uzrunt Lietuvas Republikas Seimu. uzstans liecina par pai tuvm un draudzgm attiecbm, kas pastv starp divm kaimia valstm un tautm, kuras vieno kopga izcelsme, kopgs liktenis, un kopgi nkotnes mri.)*

It is an especially great honour to address you in the very same hall where 11 years ago, a courageous group of Seimas deputies took the bold and decisive step of proclaiming Lithuania's independence from the Soviet Union on March 11, 1990.

Ten years ago, the toppling of the colossus that was the Soviet empire, after decades of tyranny and military might, was nothing short of miraculous. But it did happen, and the three Baltic nations had an important role to play in this historic turn of events. The main reason that it could happen was because the people of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia formed a united front, inspired by a common thirst for liberty, an equal conviction of the justice of their aspirations and a common vision of their future.

Today, the basic principles that guide us remain unchanged. We wish for both Latvia and Lithuania to rejoin a prosperous, stable and secure community of European nations. We share a common set of overriding values and principles with our Western neighbours, namely, a firm commitment to democracy in our political system, the primacy of the rule of law, and the respect for human rights.

Our two nations still face many practical challenges, the most evident of which is creating competitive and flourishing economies, decreasing unemployment and steadily raising the standard of living of all our people. And in this new age of globalisation, an additional series of serious challenges confronts not only Lithuania and Latvia, but all of the countries in Europe. Most notable among these are environmental pollution, disease (both animal and human), organized crime and terrorism. These are problems that know no borders, and therefore must be dealt with in close transnational cooperation.

The 20th century saw the birth of an independent Lithuania and Latvia, but it was also a century of wars, devastation and oppression. As we enter the 21st century, we do so with the firm commitment that we must make it better than the one before. We would like to lead our lives secure in the knowledge that the fruits of our labours will be ours to savour, not taken away by somebody else. We would like to build, to construct, and to develop, secure in the knowledge that what we have built will be ours to inhabit, not somebody elses. We would like to make our own choices, live with our own mistakes, and dream our own dreams.

Now that we are again masters of our fate, we can set concrete goals that will offer the best guarantees for our security, our prosperity and our potential for growth in the future.

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For both Latvia and Lithuania, our current goals and priorities are the same. We wish to become members of the European Union, and we wish to become members of the NATO Alliance.

In no way do our strivings for affiliation with these supranational bodies represent anything like a renunciation of our nations strivings for independence and a separate national identity. Neither the European Union nor the NATO Alliance have ever had any negative effect on the national identities of their member nations. Quite the contrary, they have a long tradition of allowing each country to preserve its national style, identity and culture.

By becoming full-fledged members and equal partners in these bodies, we will ensure that we sit at the table when important collective decisions have to be taken. We wish to ensure that we become active partners in decision-making rather than remaining the passive recipients of decisions made by others. The Europe of tomorrow is being shaped today. We wish to be part of that shaping process.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With a past such as ours, is it any wonder that security should be high on our agenda? Yet there is nothing original in that. Every sovereign nation is and should be serious about its security. In the case of the three Baltic countries, their accession to NATO will finally bring about a just and lasting order in a united and free Europe. It will finally put an end to the last sequels of the Second World War.

Our countries wish to become members of NATO for the very same reasons that its current members wish to remain members of NATO. NATO has served them well. It has served them so well, that more and more countries have been joining the Alliance, in successive waves of enlargement. We want to be part of the next wave, and we want to be ready when it comes.

We are not asking for any favours. We are not looking for a free ride. We are serious in our commitment to play our part in ensuring peace and stability on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. We are serious in our dedication to the principles of freedom and democracy that the NATO Alliance has pledged to defend.

The NATO Membership Action Plan is and has been a crucial instrument in guiding our progress. Step by step we have been advancing. Year by year we have been progressing. Our efforts have been planned, our plans have been evaluated; we have been getting constant feedback, encouragement, collaboration and support from many friends and allies.

An essential dimension of our NATO candidacy is the transatlantic link, our particular partnership with the United States, an important friend and ally. In this context, the US-Baltic Charter on Partnership has been especially beneficial and we certainly wish to see it continue.

NATO has declared an open door policy. When that door opens next, at the NATO summit of 2002, we want to be ready to enter. When the time comes for the decisions on that enlargement, the NATO member-states, and only the member-states, should be the ones to take that decision. No country not part of the Alliance should be able to determine who is admitted, and who is not. Both these important principles have been asserted in a variety of official pronouncements, and we trust that they will indeed be followed when it comes time to apply them in practice.

In the time remaining until the Prague Summit, both NATO member-states and NATO candidate countries have to stress again and again that this is not an offensive but a defensive Alliance. NATO in its current form, without the Baltic States in it, is not a threat to Russia. The small countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, either now or in the future, are not a threat to a large nuclear power such as Russia. Obviously, there is no possible logic and no possible arithmetic that could create a threat to Russia out of the three Baltic countries becoming members of NATO. The very idea is absurd!

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Ladies and gentlemen,

In addition to the important advances we have made in upgrading our defence capability, we have also achieved considerable progress in preparing for accession to the European Union. While both Lithuania and Latvia began accession negotiations just a little more than a year ago, we have made great strides in catching up with those candidate states that began negotiations two years earlier.

During these historic years, when the map of Europe is being redrawn and the structures of the EU are being reevaluated, we are moving on the fast track and are making supreme efforts to ensure that we are party to the first wave of enlargement. Clearly, we have a lot of catching up to do. After all, it took 50 years for Western Europe to achieve its current level of development.

Nevertheless, Latvia is determined to conclude accession negotiations by the end of next year. Indeed, it is my sincere hope that both Latvia and Lithuania will become full-fledged members of the EU in the year 2004. As long as the EU accession process remains an individual one and is based on the proper merits of each candidate country, our countries have a real chance of being among the next member-states of the European Union.

Eurointegration as a national goal has been an effective tool for the far-reaching reforms and the fast pace of development of Latvia and Lithuania. Our accession negotiations have provided us with the added impetus to spur our internal development and to speed up our reforms. The Eurointegration process has helped us to identify our weak areas and to formulate policy priorities in a more focused way.

Latvia and Lithuania can assist each other through more intensive consultations on issues of mutual concern in our EU accession negotiations.

I am pleased that a solid legal basis is now in place to facilitate entrepreneurial activity, as well as cultural and educational exchanges between our two countries. On the grass-roots level, contacts among our municipalities and non-governmental organisations are also increasing.

However, we still have some homework to do within the framework of our bilateral relations. This is perfectly natural and we must keep working at it until mutually satisfactory solutions can be found. The ratification of our sea border treaty has been delayed in the Latvian Saeima because of concerns over access to traditional fishing grounds.

The most recent oil spill in the Baltic Sea near Butinge has revealed that our two countries have yet to arrive at co-ordinated action in dealing with environmental pollution. Oil contamination of the shared waterways that are our lifeblood is particularly dangerous and is not confineable within one country's national borders.

The Baltic Sea is a small and enclosed water basin. As such, it is particularly vulnerable and fragile. Pollution destroys spawning grounds for fish, kills birds and wildlife, and contaminates the white sands of our beaches. It poses a serious threat to human health as well, not to mention the potentially crippling effect on our fishing and tourism industries. It is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. I am convinced that Latvia and Lithuania do possess the necessary commitment and the political will to resolve this urgent issue. Our past history shows that we have the proven ability to successfully overcome our differences at the negotiating table.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we continue to strengthen our relations with our neighbours and allies to the West and to the North, we also stand ready for increased cooperation with our neighbours to the East, including, of course, Russia. Like other post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Russia is attempting to restructure its economy and implement democratic

forms of governance. It has also pledged to abide by international human rights standards in the conduct of its affairs. While Russia is currently experiencing certain difficulties in these areas, I am confident that it will succeed in its endeavours.

As future members of the European Union and NATO, our relationship with Russia will inevitably evolve within that international context. I am firmly convinced that this will create a new basis for our improved relations, which are sure to be mutually beneficial if carried on in a pragmatic and sensible way.

As part of the European family of nations, we Latvians and Lithuanians will each keep our identity, our language, our culture. The fates of Latvia and Lithuania, as the last two surviving nations of Baltic origin, have been linked for centuries. As neighbours, as friends and as allies we are building our common future together. I hope you will forgive me if I include a thought for Latvia as well in the beautiful wish contained in Lithuanias national anthem:

**Tegu saul Lietuvoj**

*Lai saule Lietuv*

**Tamsumus praalina**

*Tumsu izncina*

**Ir viesā, ir tiesā,**

*Un gaišā, un patiesā*

**Ms ingsnius telydi.**

*[ ingsus]*

*Lai pavada msu gaitas (sous).*