



Latvijas Republikas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja Prezidenta preses dienests

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Address by H.E. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of Latvia, at the opening of the International Folklore Festival Baltica 2000, Turaida, 6 July, 2000

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hereby declare the International Folklore Festival BALTICA-2000 as officially opened!

As President of Latvia, I extend my warmest welcome to all our visitors from abroad, both the active participants in folklore groups from many lands, and the spectators from many parts of the world, who are here among us.

The main theme of this years Festival is the sea a topic rich in symbolic meaning as well as practical importance to many peoples of the world. Here in Latvia, our shores are bathed by the Baltic Sea, the only one in Europe entirely surrounded by European nations, our true *Mare nostrum*, the sea we can truly call our very own.

In many mythologies of the world, the sea represents the primal, shapeless chaos from which the visible, solid world arose, like butter being formed from the churning of milk. In a practical sense, the sea has been a highway of communication between nations, carrying now peaceful traders and voyagers, now threatening marauders or invaders. The sea has been a nourishing mother to countless generations of fishermen, and Latvian folksongs often contrast the relative merits of living off the sea or off the land. Yet with her fierce storms and dangerous waves, the sea has also been the destroyer of lives. Many a sailor has gone to a watery grave, including my own father.

While the sea may be the best representative of water as one of the four elements, this opening day of the BALTICA-2000 Folklore Festival, has been particularly devoted to the spring, another form of water rich in symbolic meaning. Among them, in Latvian folklore, is the spring as symbol of the bounty of the Cosmic, a never-ending source of abundance, prosperity and joy. But in the most general sense, the folk traditions that we have all inherited all flow from the inexhaustible source of human inspiration. They rise from the common wellsprings of human experience gaiety and sadness, pleasure and suffering, pride and shame, success and failure and, ultimately life and death. In their songs and in their dances, our ancestors have handed down to us the very distillate of countless generations of human experience. May every participant of this Festival drink from these Waters of Life and feel rejuvenated in spirit and refreshed in soul.