



Latvijas Republikas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja Prezidenta preses dienests

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Address at the Baltic Defence College in Tartu, Estonia, May 3, 2000 by the President of Latvia, H. E. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga

Your Excellency President Meri,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
(Tartu City Council Chairman Mr. Tulviste,
Mayor of Tartu Mr. Ansipa,
Tartu University Rector Jaak Aaviksoo,
Baltic Defence College Rector General Klemensen),

My first official state visit abroad as the President of Latvia is drawing to a close, and I shall be very glad indeed, if during future state visits to other countries, I am received with the same degree of heartfelt warmth and hospitality that I have experienced here in Estonia.

During the past three days, I have been moved by your peoples friendliness and enthusiasm. The pace and the zeal, with which Estonia has accomplished so much, in so little time, have impressed me. And the excellent neighbourly relations that exist have heartened me between our two countries.

I hope that my visit here will serve to strengthen the good will and the close co-operation that has already been established between Latvia and Estonia. And I would like to express my deepest gratitude to President Meri and Helle Meri for their wonderful welcome.

Your fine capital city, Tallinn, is a true jewel on the northern shores of the Baltic Sea. The beautiful Põltsamaa countryside looks radiant in its springtime colours. And your historic cultural and educational centre, Tartu, exudes a special charm and vitality that are not soon forgotten.

Like Tallinn, Tartu is simultaneously an ancient and a modern city, combining the best of both the past and the present. Both Tallinn and Tartu have preserved the architectural masterpieces of past centuries, while boldly looking forward to the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Tallinn and Tartu are both home to first-rate educational institutions, such as Concordia University, Tartu University, and the Baltic Defence College. These institutions are producing talented specialists who will help Estonia to realise its full potential in a rapidly changing, globalised world. Estonia realises the value of a well-rounded education, and I found it extremely invigorating to meet with the bright students and staff of these three Universities and Colleges.

I have been very impressed with the ambitious and far-sighted programme that is being implemented here at the Baltic Defence College. The establishment of this College is an extremely valuable initiative. It represents an excellent example of how wisely distributed and pooled resources can help all three Baltic countries come closer to achieving their common goals, which include membership in the NATO alliance.

I am convinced that the Baltic Defence College will soon acquire the same degree of praise and admiration as other joint Baltic defence initiatives, including BALTBAT,

BALTRON, and BALTNET.

The close level of co-operation between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in various fields of activity has been very successful, and has served as a model to be emulated in other parts of the world. The three Baltic countries must continue their co-operative efforts and work together even more closely in the future, in the same noble spirit that drove our common drive for independence during the Singing Revolution a decade ago.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have a clear vision of their future, as prosperous and stable nations in a united European continent. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have a clear vision of where they belong, as full member-states of the European Union, and of the NATO alliance.

Once again, I would like to extend my immense gratitude to President Meri and to the people of Estonia, for their warm reception and for their enthusiastic support in the strengthening of the already excellent relations that exist between Latvia and Estonia. I raise my glass in tribute to the close ties of friendship that link our two sister countries. And I raise my glass with the hope that together our countries will soon reach the high level of prosperity and stability that they are actively seeking to achieve.