



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

Address by H. E. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of Latvia, to Latvian soldiers at the Freedom Monument in Riga, 11 November 1999

Soldiers of Latvia,
Officers of Latvia,
People of Latvia!
Mother brought up her son
A soldier to be,
Short jackets to be sewn,
Long hair to be grown.

During ancient times, long hair differentiated the free man from the servant and from the slave. Mothers brought up their sons to be soldiers, because to our predecessors being a soldier was of the highest honour.

'Tis better I be slain in war
Than by the side of the road.
My sister earns the glory
From a brother slain in war.

Today, here at the foot of our Monument to Freedom, we commemorate Lplsis Day [named after a mythical Latvian hero] and we remember it as the founding of Latvia's independent army 80 years ago. It was 80 years ago on this autumn date, that newly independent Latvia's armed forces crossed the bridges of the Daugava River and liberated Riga from the forces of Bermondts [a German army commander].

These men lacked clothing. They didn't have proper uniforms. They didn't have proper armaments or adequate firearms. And yet with their will power, their determination, with their love of their country and outstanding heroism, they managed to achieve victory against forces four times larger and better armed. With this victory Latvia's soldiers won and consolidated our place on the world map, which our people's representatives had demanded and declared the previous year on the 18th of November.

An independent, powerful army offers the strongest pillar of security to an independent, sovereign country. Free Latvia requires well ordered, professionally high standard armed forces; such that are capable of protecting their country, of receiving assistance from their allies in times of crisis, and of taking part in international peace-keeping operations.

I am very proud of the Latvian youths who have already taken part, and will continue to take part in international NATO peacekeeping activities. When I visited our units in Bosnia, I heard only words of praise about our boys from their Danish commanders. We must continue to support our army. We must continue showing that we are ready, willing and able to invest the necessary resources in order to ensure the defence and security of our country.

If we are not prepared to defend ourselves, then no one else will be prepared to come to Latvia's aid during its hour of need. Our country has chosen a security model that

foresees preparations for accession to the NATO international alliance. We still have much to do in order to be adequately prepared and organised for our accession. However, this is a clearly marked path and we are forging ahead with certainty and with confidence.

The guardian of our ancestral warriors was Prkons (Thunder). Prkons' symbols are stone, steel and the oak tree. To Latvia's soldiers I wish the firm will of steel, the toughness of stone and the stateliness of an oak tree. May Prkons help us to drive out all devils and goblins so that the true sun of freedom can rise again, as it did upon the caps of newly independent Latvia's first soldiers when they marched into battle. May God grant our soldiers strength, may God grant us all the strength to fight against the forces of darkness and evil.

God, bless Latvia!