



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. Dr.Vaira Vike-Freiberga, the State President of Latvia to the Parliament of Finland, Helsinki the 31st of August 1999

Mrs. First Deputy Speaker of the Parliament!

Distinguished parliamentarians!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

May I express my deepest gratitude to the Parliament of Finland for the honour that has been bestowed upon me by the Eduskunta, and for the warm hospitality that I have received here.

In my short address to this distinguished audience, I should like to stress the significance of my visit to Helsinki, which comes so early in my presidency. This gesture underlines the tremendous importance that Latvia places upon its relationship with Finland and with the other Nordic countries. It is my deepest conviction that the well-being and prosperity of the Latvian and Finnish people is closely linked with our ability to understand and cooperate with each other. Our societies are facing many common challenges, and these can be properly addressed only if we pool our efforts.

For centuries the destiny of the Latvian and of the Finnish peoples has followed a closely similar path. One of the common features of our societies is a deeply rooted sense of egalitarianism, which was developed through the ideas of the Northern Renaissance and of the Reformation. We share common goals and values which gives us the necessary preconditions for genuine mutual understanding.

The second thing I should like to stress is the immense value I place on the co-operation between Latvia and Finland. Together we have achieved a great deal since my country regained its independence.

The inhabitants of our countries can now freely visit each other without restriction, which greatly facilitates the development of close links and effective cooperation in all spheres of activity, be it business, education or culture.

We have successfully combined our endeavours to transform the Baltic Sea region into an area of relative prosperity, human dignity, rule of law and stability. We can be proud of these achievements. Our region is dynamic, stable and safe. May I take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to the Finnish Parliament and Government for the continued support that my country had received from its close neighbour Finland.

The third issue I should like to raise concerns the values that Latvia would like to emphasize in its relationship with Finland. These include an open, socially active and equal society, a transparent and decentralized state system, a reliable social system, and high standards of education. These values are already deeply entrenched in the modern Nordic societies. In these spheres we have an immense potential to strengthen our common Northern European identity.

There is a strong belief in Latvia that the broad and comprehensive interaction between the peoples of our countries must continue and develop. We share a common vision on the future development of the Baltic Sea region. We share an identical understanding of those developments within a broader European perspective.

And finally, I would like to stress that your country deserves the utmost admiration and praise for ably carrying out its responsibilities as the presiding country of the European Union. I sincerely hope that under Finland's Presidency, your country will succeed in accomplishing the goals that it has set for itself, and that the EU as a whole will benefit greatly.

I hope I may be forgiven for mentioning that Latvia has great expectations regarding the December meeting of the European Council in Helsinki. We harbour great hopes of being invited to begin accession negotiations for membership in the European Union, and look forward to December 1999 as an important date in Latvian history.

Thank you for your attention!