



Latvijas Republikas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja Prezidenta preses dienests

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Address by H.E. Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of Latvia, at the official dinner hosted by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, January 18, 2005

Your Majesty Queen Beatrix,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the warm welcome and heartfelt hospitality that I personally, my husband Professor Freibergs and my delegation have experienced during our stay here in the Netherlands. We are deeply honoured to be received as guests of this distinguished Royal House, whose history goes back more than six centuries. It is also an immense pleasure to lead the first official visit to the Netherlands by a Latvian head of State.

This important visit testifies to the increasingly close relationship that is developing between Latvia and the Netherlands. I have very fond memories of my pleasant meeting three years ago in Riga with His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince Willem Alexander and Princess Máxima. Their official visit provided an added impetus to our countries friendly bilateral relations. I also recall with satisfaction my warm and insightful conversation with you, Your majesty, last September, during a conference in The Hague.

Earlier this morning, as my plane descended for landing at Rotterdam Airport, I had the opportunity to gaze down upon your beautiful country from the air. I was impressed by the orderliness and tidiness of every aspect of the landscape. I was overcome with a feeling of immense admiration at the sheer scale of hard work and resources that the people of the Netherlands have so evidently invested over the centuries to wrest their country from the sea and make it one of the most well-kept and prosperous on the planet. The Netherlands can truly be proud of the dedication, innovation and industriousness of their people.

I can say with certainty that the people of the Netherlands and of Latvia each share a deep sense of patriotism for their country. Both of our nations have, in the course of their history, experienced trying periods of war and foreign occupation.

That is why the people of both of our countries cherish their national independence and that is why we fully realize the true value of freedom and democracy. Through tenaciousness and determination, each of our small nations has managed to maintain its own, distinct sense of national identity.

Your Majesty,

In both Latvia and the Netherlands, the Second World War caused great destruction and loss of life. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced into exile. Your own family found refuge in Ottawa, Canada, where you first attended school and where Princess Margriet was born. I was also forced into exile during the war as a child. After spending ten years in Germany and Morocco, I arrived in Canada in 1954, since alas, the end of the war had not resulted in the restitution of my country's independence.

Of the many Latvians who were forced to flee their homeland from the occupying Nazi German and Soviet Russian armies, several hundred found refuge in the Netherlands. Latvias thanks go to the selfless Dutch individuals and organizations that provided food, clothing, shelter and support to those in need of assistance.

Your Majesty,

Besides shared historical experiences of hardship, as well as a love of liberty and a strongly engrained sense of resolve, Latvia and the Netherlands share a common future together in an enlarged European family of free, secure and prosperous nations. I take this opportunity to express Latvias deepest appreciation for the political and practical assistance that the Netherlands provided in support of Latvias preparations for accession to both the European Union and the NATO Alliance.

Now, as equal partners in these two organizations our countries share the common responsibility of promoting peace, security and continued economic development in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

Both Latvia and the Netherlands share the conviction that in order to achieve this objective, the EU and the NATO Alliance must be strong and united. In addition, the United Nations and the international justice system must be strengthened. We are putting our common conviction into practice through an active, multilateral foreign policy that is being strengthened by close cooperation between our two countries at the regional and bilateral levels.

The closing of the Netherlands successful presidency of the European Union was marked by several significant decisions concerning the further expansion of the European Union. Together, we will have to ensure that an expanded EU results in a stronger EU. This will require the strengthening of the EUs institutions, along with the concerted application of the *acquis communautaire* among the EUs member States, as well as more resolute efforts to implement the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Equally important is the strengthening of Europes transatlantic partnership with North America, both within the framework of the NATO Alliance and on a wider scale. Only by working together will Europe and North America succeed in combating terrorism and other security threats that are of equal concern on both sides of the Atlantic. Latvia fully supports the efforts of NATOs Secretary General to ensure that NATO is able to deal with the new threats of the 21st century.

Latvia also thanks the Netherlands and the NATO Secretary General for ensuring the collective security of the three Baltic countries air space. Ten years ago, when Soviet troops were just withdrawn from Latvia, few would have imagined that fighter pilots from the Netherlands would one day be conducting defence patrols of the Baltic countries airspace. This will actually be the case within a matter of months, and will be yet another example of our countries resolve and ability to work together successfully.

Your Majesty,

Historically, the links between our two nations experienced a considerable expansion during the 16th and 17th centuries, when Dutch maritime trade with the Baltic cities, and most notably with Riga, contributed to the Golden Age of the Netherlands.

Today the bilateral relations between Latvia and the Netherlands are striking in the scope of their breadth and diversity, at the political, economic and cultural levels. Riga and Amsterdam, which had close commercial links in the past, are once again re-establishing a secure partnership. Eight other cities in Latvia now enjoy friendship ties with municipalities in the Netherlands. The close cooperation between our governments in the sphere of higher education has encouraged a healthy exchange of students, professors and scientists. And I am particularly proud of the fact that my countryman Mariss Jansons recently became the principal conductor of Amsterdams world famous Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

The people of Latvia and the Netherlands share common ideals, common values and a common vision of the future. I am confident that our countries growing partnership will strengthen in the years to come, as we work together for a new and better Europe without wars, conflicts and artificial borders.

Once again, Your Majesty, I express my heartfelt thanks to you, personally and to the people of the Netherlands for the very warm welcome that we have received here. I raise this toast to Your Majestys health and happiness, to the health and happiness of the Royal Family, to the continued wealth and prosperity of the people of the Netherlands, and to a growing spirit of friendship and partnership between Latvia and the Netherlands.