



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, President of Latvia, at Leiden University, January 18, 2005

Larger Europe A Stronger Europe?

Your Majesty,

Ministers,

Excellencies,

President and Rector Magnificus of the University,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased and honoured to address this distinguished audience at Leiden University, the oldest institution of higher learning in the Netherlands and one of the most esteemed centres of academia and research in Europe. I am also honoured to head the first official visit by a Latvian head of state to the Netherlands and am especially grateful to Her Majesty Queen Beatrix for being here with us today.

I was asked to speak to you about whether an enlarged Europe will lead to a stronger Europe. I think I will begin by putting us in a historical context and then address what I perceive to be our main challenges in the short and long term.

The foundations for the enlarged and reunited Europe that we have set out to build together were laid on the ruins of a continent that had been severely traumatized by the Second World War the most devastating conflict that mankind has ever experienced. In fact, the immeasurable suffering and loss of lives by both world wars of the 20th century led to the sobering realization that further confrontations with modern weapons could lead to the annihilation of human civilization as we know it. This wake-up call tempered nationalist and totalitarian yearnings to unite Europe by the use of arms and military force.

Over a century-and-a-half ago, in 1849, the French author and politician Victor Hugo said the following at the Paris Peace Congress: .. *Un jour viendra où la guerre paraîtra aussi absurde et sera aussi impossible entre Paris et Londres, entre Ptersbourg et Berlin, entre Vienne et Turin, quelle serait impossible et quelle paraîtrait absurde aujourd'hui entre Rouen en Amiens, entre Boston et Philadelphie.*

Monet, Schumann and other enlightened politicians sought a non-violent means for ensuring peace in the future. For the first time in modern history, they referred to a sense of shared values for uniting the people of Europe. The founding of the European Coal and Steel Community, based on these fundamental values, paved the way for the incremental establishment of what we now know as the European Union.

As Victor Hugo proclaimed at the same Paris Peace Congress in 1849:

..Un jour viendra où il ny aura dautres champs de bataille que les marches souvrant au commerce et les esprits souvrant aux idées. (..)

Paragraph 6 of the European Unions founding document explicitly states the values that we, as Europeans, share in common:

liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law.

The new European Constitution supplements these principles with such additional terms as pluralism, tolerance, fairness, solidarity and non-discrimination. These form the foundations of European, 21st century political culture.

Unfortunately, while one half of Europe grew and prospered after the Second World War, the other half languished for several more decades behind the Iron Curtain under communism, totalitarianism and foreign domination. That is why later this year, on May the 9th, when I join Europes leaders in Moscow to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, I will be doing so with mixed emotions.

Latvia, together with the rest of Europe, will rejoice at the defeat of Nazi Germany and its fascist regime, which had occupied and subjugated over a dozen European nations, including the Netherlands; which had been responsible for the killing of millions of innocent civilians throughout Europe and which had driven millions more into exile. In my own country of Latvia, the Nazi Germans and their local accomplices carried out the most heinous and large-scale crimes against humanity to have ever been committed on Latvian soil.

However, unlike the case in Western Europe, the fall of the hated Nazi German empire did not result in my countrys liberation. Instead, the three Baltic countries of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were subject to another brutal occupation by another foreign, totalitarian empire, that of the Soviet Union. For five long decades, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were erased from the map of Europe. Under Soviet rule, the three Baltic countries experienced mass deportations and killings, the loss of their freedom, and the influx of over a million Russian-speaking settlers.

As the President of a country that suffered greatly under Soviet rule, I feel obliged to remind the world at large that humanitys most devastating conflict might not have occurred, had the two totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union not agreed to secretly divide the territories of Eastern Europe amongst themselves. I am referring to the shameful agreement signed on August 23rd of 1939 by the foreign ministers of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, Vyatcheslav Molotov and Joachim Ribbentrop.

A week-and-a-half later, as a direct result of this disgraceful pacts secret supplementary protocols, Hitler invaded Poland and started the Second World War. The Soviet Union then occupied the eastern half of Poland, with Hitlers full compliance, and invaded Finland later that year. Then, in June of 1940, Russian troops invaded and occupied Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. These invasions and occupations had been foreseen and agreed to in advance by Hitler and Stalin.

These two dictators, Hitler and Stalin, bear the brunt of the blame for starting the Second World War, along with the immense human loss and suffering that ensued. In commemorating those who lost their lives during the Second World War, we must not fail to remember the crimes against humanity committed by both Hitler and Stalin, and we must not fail to mention both of these totalitarian tyrants by name.

I believe it the duty of all democratic countries to urge Russia to condemn the crimes that were committed on its own soil and in neighbouring countries in the name of communism during the Soviet era. Russia should be urged to come to honest terms with all the complexities of its history, just as Germany did following the end of the Second World War, and just as my own country has done ever since the recovery of its independence.

For Latvia, the end of the Second World War came only decades later, on May the 4th, 1990. This was the date when my countrys parliament passed a declaration of independence from the Soviet Union. This May, Latvians will be celebrating the 15th anniversary of that historic declaration.

On May the 1st of this year, Latvia will also be celebrating the first anniversary of its accession to the European Union. This is the date that bridges at last the divide that had split our continent ever since the end of the Second World War. Only since that date have

we erased at last the final vestiges of Stalins inheritance and the enlarged sphere of influence that he was allowed to seize after the fall of Hitler. May 1st marks the return of my country to an extended European family of free and democratic nations. In order to bridge this divide, Latvia, like the whole post-communist group of new member countries, has had to go through an accelerated process of reform, change and reorientation of values.

We have recovered our freedom of thought, of religion, as well as all other civil liberties. We have recovered the freedom of movement and assembly which had been denied us for so long. Most of all, we have recovered the sovereign right to make our own decisions and to chart our own destiny. In doing so we, along with the other nine new member states of the Union, have fulfilled the prophecy that Victor Hugo expressed 155 years before:

.. Un jour viendra où vous France, vous Russie, vous Italie, vous Angleterre, vous Allemagne, vous toutes, nations du continent, sans perdre vos qualits distinctes et votre glorieuse individualit, vous vous fondrez troitement dans une unit suprieure, et vous constituerez la fraternit europenne, absolument comme la Normandie, la Bretagne, la Bourgogne, la Lorraine, l'Alsace, toutes nos provinces se sont fondues dans la France.

Your Majesty,

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the accession of ten new member states, the European Union has grown into an unprecedented space of liberties governed by democratic, humanistic values. It has also grown into a huge, single market of more than 450 million consumers. This market accounts for nearly a fifth (18%) of world trade and contributes to more than a quarter (25%) of the world's GDP. Europeans, particularly in the Western part of the continent, enjoy among the highest standards of living in the world. Apart from their higher incomes, they benefit from generous, State-sponsored, welfare and old-age pension systems.

The newest member states, however, still lag behind in many respects. This certainly is the case in Latvia, which currently is in last place in terms of average income. While the capital, Riga, and many parts of the country have seen fantastic changes in growth and development, there are still regions with pockets of high unemployment and poverty.

A major challenge for the years ahead lies in reducing the large economic disparities that still exist between the EUs older and newer member States, and to do so as rapidly as possible. Fortunately, the mechanisms that the EU is able to deploy for reducing regional disparities are undeniably effective. Its equalization programmes and development funds have produced viable and tangible results, and have greatly contributed to raising the standard of living of one new member State after the other, including Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Greece. With the high motivation of its population and a work ethic that even the Soviet occupation did not manage to destroy, Latvia has been exhibiting consistently high rates of economic growth in the past years. Latvia has every chance and every intention of catching up, and catching up fast.

Paradoxically, Europes achievements have made Europeans the victims of their own success. Europe is losing its competitive advantages. Competition from the outside is becoming increasingly fierce. Europe will have to take some painful steps to foster its economic growth. In that respect, the accession of ten new member states, where wages are generally lower, might provide the needed stimulus for Europe to regain its competitiveness. I believe that the basic principles of a free market economy must remain in place; that the free movement of persons, goods and services must be observed within the EU-25. The EU will have to address some serious issues, where the social contract in some countries has put in place unacceptable barriers to free-market economic principles. A common ground will have to be found without endangering the socially oriented gains that a number of countries, particularly in Scandinavia, are so proud of.

Within all European countries we are also experiencing a change in the population structure, meaning that the younger generations will have to pay for the pensions of an

increasing number of elderly people. This is a problem that won't go away and plans for dealing with it have to be put in place now. That is why in my opinion the key elements for dynamic economic development in the EU are education, knowledge and innovation.

Your Majesty,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union is a large family of diverse and democratic nations, where solidarity is the cornerstone of co-operation. This rich diversity, which may at times present challenges to consensus-building, is nevertheless one of Europe's greatest strengths and assets. It is a resource that must be nurtured and cherished. I believe that in this regard, the enlargement of the EU has provided the necessary stimulus for revising decision-making procedures that were obviously too cumbersome even before enlargement.

Undeniably, there is confusion and apprehension about the new Europe that we wish to build. Many people see the EU as an intrusive, bureaucratic morass run by corrupt officials who cater to big business and powerful, corporate lobbies. Many have become largely indifferent to Europe and do not identify with it. The moral crisis that has arisen is reflected in our increasingly frivolous entertainment industries, which wilfully titillate and arouse our basest desires for sex, excitement and violence.

On the streets of some countries we see increasing disillusionment, social tensions, intolerance and a return to nationalistic tendencies. More and more people are reverting to their nation state as the lynchpin of their identity, and paradoxically, many are turning to their deputies in the European Parliament to defend what they see as their national interests.

One major challenge is to build open, democratic societies that respect the ethnic, linguistic and cultural heritage of each European nation. In the Netherlands and elsewhere, economic immigration has not been accompanied by the complete social integration of all newcomers. In Latvia as well, many people still do not speak the State language. This is the consequence of a deliberate policy of Russification during the Soviet occupation. Without respect for the local language, traditions and culture, it is much more difficult to build a society with a clear sense of the values it has developed over a period of centuries.

I believe that we need to revive the Europe of culture and the Europe of ethics. We need to revive, as Goethe wrote hundreds of years ago, a respect for the God who created us, a respect for our planet, a respect for our fellow human beings, and a respect for our fundamental values. We need to strengthen the sense of brotherhood and the sense of community among Europeans. If we succeed in doing so, then the enlarged Europe of the 21st century will indeed become the stronger Europe we want it to become.