



Latvijas Republikas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja Prezidenta preses dienests

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Address by H.E. Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, at the Porvoo City Council, Finland 26 April 2006

Mrs. Nylander,
Mr. Nuutti,
Mr. Mayor, (Per-Håkan Slotte)
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased at this opportunity to visit the city of Porvoo, where the first foundations for the Finnish state were laid and where the Finnish nation began to consolidate. Indeed, it is generally accepted that Finland's recent political history dates back to the Diet at Porvoo of 1809, which was the first representative body of Finland as a Grand Duchy. From today's perspective, the assembly at Porvoo paved the way for the foundation of Finland's current parliament, the *Eduskunta*, which I had the pleasure to address yesterday and which celebrates its 100th anniversary this year.

Porvoo is known as the residence and place of inspiration for many famous Finnish thinkers and artists. Johan Ludvig Runeberg lived here with his family for 40 years. We in Latvia know Runeberg as a notable lyric and epic poet. Along with Elias Lönnrot (the author of the *Kalevala*), Runeberg helped to raise the newly created Grand Duchy of Finland to the status of a cultural nation in the eyes of both Finns and foreigners. He created an ideal of Finland's people and Nature, he gave the country a moral identity with his *Tales of Ensign Stal*, and he wrote the words to a poem, *Our Country*, which later became the words to Finland's national anthem.

The Porvoo of today remains an outstanding place, where its talented citizens are skillfully bringing together the glory of the city's past with its modern-day economic achievements. Porvoo is also a sister city of the Latvian port Ventspils, and there is a promising potential to develop this relationship further.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Finland truly is one of Latvia's closest partners, and not only in a geographical sense. The particularly good relationship that our countries enjoy is based, first and foremost, on our adherence to such common ideals as freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and the respect for human rights. Latvia and Finland also share a mutual interest in ensuring continued growth and stability within the Baltic Sea region and in Europe as a whole. It is therefore important that we strengthen our cooperation in various fields and at all levels of society.

I thank the leadership and residents of Porvoo for their heartfelt hospitality. I raise this toast to the achievements of this beautiful city, to the prosperity and happiness of Porvoo's inhabitants, and to an increasingly close friendship between the people of Finland and Latvia.