



## 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

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### Address by H.E. Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of Latvia, at Chatham House, London, 11 July 2006

#### Latvia's perspective on international peace, security and development

Lord Robertson,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I think it is a recapturee to have entered a phase of history that is the next step beyond those days, Lord Robertson, which you and I saw together. Very exciting days, very tense sometimes for Latvia and, of course, it has been a privilege to be living through that period of European history, which has changed the face of Europe. But the whole point of it was that we would then go on leading and living rather more or if you like less exalted sort of days and more regular. But the world will always be presenting us with challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a distinct honour and a privilege to be here at Chatham House, such a place with a high reputation which for decades has been known as one of the world's leading organisations for the analysis of international issues. It is a special pleasure and an honour for me to be here in London as a special guest of Her Majesty's Government and as Sir Robertson pointed out, I am very much looking forward to the first-ever visit by a reigning monarch of the UK to Latvia later on this year, in the month of October.

Looking back at the history of British and Latvian bilateral relations, we might single out the fact that the United Kingdom was the very first country to recognize the *de facto* independence of Latvia and did so occurred on November 11, 1918, a full week before the official proclamation of the Republic of Latvia was made on November 18. In the spring of 1919, just a few months later, the Russian Bolsheviks had actually occupied a large part of Latvian territory and the provisional government had taken refuge on the steamer *Saratov* off the western coast of Latvia. And this ship was then placed under the protection of British warships. It became a sanctuary and a working site for the Latvian provisional government. The participation of British military forces in Latvian liberation battles throughout 1919, during which, by the way, a number of British soldiers were killed, generated a very favourable attitude towards the UK in Latvia during the whole interwar period. In fact it had some tragic consequences in the sense that Latvians felt they had been saved by the British in many ways at the end of the First World War and they rather hoped that the same thing would happen at the end of the Second, but it did not sadly.

However now, after an interruption of half a century, Latvia and the United Kingdom are once again, thank Heavens, partners and allies. Both of our countries are working closely together as members of the European Union and the NATO Alliance to create a peaceful and stable world in the 21st century, one in which, hopefully, no child will have to go through the sorts of experiences that the children of my generation lived through.

In today's era of globalization, a country's national interests, any country's national interests, surely do not end at its borders, or even in its immediate neighbourhood. This is true with regard to security as much as in the economic domain. Today the security of millions of people around the world is subject to the threats posed by terrorism and

extremism. And sadly hardly a day goes by when we do not get news of loss of life again, caused by that type of attacks.

Terrorism and political radicalism are frequently fuelled by seemingly far-away conflicts. In many cases, they are further abetted by economic hardship, as well as by undemocratic and poorly run state administrations.

The world's democracies can hope to counter international terrorism only through close international cooperation, and that is one of the reasons why the Transatlantic partnership is so important for Latvia and also for the United Kingdom. Both of our countries see the future of Europe as closely linked with that of the United States and Canada. After all North Americans share the same values as we do. We share a same firm belief in freedom, democracy, the respect for human rights and the rule of law, seemingly simple and elementary things, but so enormously difficult to achieve in practice. And we know how difficult, from our experience. Although there are times when Europe and North America may disagree on certain specific issues, I think it is important to remember that these differences of opinion in specific matters should never detract us from our overall goal of ensuring global security for us all. This requires close cooperation in uncovering and dismantling terrorist networks, and ultimately, of course, one hopes of dealing with the root causes of terrorism, something, which I think we have not really begun to truly address.

We need to build stronger coalitions with the emerging and developing democracies, so as to avoid the emergence of new generations of terrorists whose hatred and self-hatred is fuelled, among other things, by a deep sense of injustice.

Together with the United Kingdom and other allies, Latvia has been deploying its peacekeepers to help provide stability in Afghanistan, in Iraq and in the Balkans. The ultimate goal of all these efforts is to establish genuine democracies and basic economic development in these troubled regions. This, in turn, should contribute to stemming the rise of extremism and terrorism, quite apart from the direct benefits to all the inhabitants of the countries concerned.

It is essential, however, that international involvement in the trouble spots of this world should continue after armed hostilities have finally ceased. This is where the newly created Peace Building Committee of the UN should play a very important role. In East Timor, for example, conflict recently reignited in part because the international community have withdrawn prematurely. In this regard, the EU has its own role to play as a growing crisis manager and must continue strengthening its capacity to respond to crises. NATO also has begun paying more attention to the stabilisation and reconstruction phase of its missions abroad. Both organisations need to establish the means for better coordinating their efforts for mediation and crisis resolution.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

In order to ensure the security of its member states and adapt to all the changing threats of our era, NATO will have to continue its military transformation, which will be the principal issue for this year's NATO Summit in Riga. I believe that NATO should also increase its level of cooperation in joint peacekeeping efforts with other countries, far-away countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. All of these have shown their capacity for effective intervention and we would all gain by working more closely together, even if not necessarily by means of formalized structures.

At the same time, NATO should continue encouraging Europe's new democracies. Latvia for its part is devoting concerted efforts to assist Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova in particular. We have expressed our support for offering NATO's MAP to Ukraine by the Riga Summit; but of course, this is conditional on the country itself having a government that is supporting such a direction and such a position, and not to mention the fact that Ukraine clearly has to continue a whole series of reforms before closer collaboration can even be

considered. We also fully support Georgia's endeavours to establish a closer relationship with the alliance. I think that they are ready to move ahead and they will need our encouragement.

Latvia also hopes that Europe can establish a pragmatic working relationship with Russia, which clearly has an important role to play in the world's security architecture. Russia's active participation is essential for countering international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, we must not shy away from a constructive and open and frank dialogue with Russia even on the most sensitive issues, including the consistent adherence to democratic principles and the rule of law.

Ever since Latvia regained its independence in 1991, the establishment of good neighbourly relations with Russia has remained constant on our agenda. Over the past fifteen years, hopeful periods have kept alternating with less encouraging ones. We have managed to resolve a number of very difficult issues, to start with the withdrawal of Russian troops from our territory, no mean thing and something with far-reaching consequences. But we do still have a list of others to be resolved, among them the conclusion of a border agreement. Lately, political dialogue on the highest level has resumed between our two countries. Very recently Latvia's Prime Minister has met with Russia's President and the Prime Minister, following early this spring a historic visit by the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Alexiy II. We do hope that these meetings will provide a further impetus for improving our relations.

We would also like to see more coordination on foreign policy issues among the EU member countries. And it is proving to be a daunting challenge. Nonetheless, we do think it is important that the EU should have a more coherent Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). As far as it is possible, it needs to maintain a single voice in its dialogue with Russia, with China or indeed with other parts of the world.

The EU is closely involved in the promotion of democratic and economic reforms in its neighbouring countries through the European Neighbourhood Policy. This is distinctly a priority for Latvia as well as for a number of other countries. Latvia also favours a more proactive policy by the EU for achieving the settlement of frozen conflicts in the EU's vicinity, including the issue of Transdnestria in Moldova and South Ossetia in Georgia. Needless to say, the EU must do all it can to foster progress towards democracy in Belarus and look for ways to promote the growth of civil society in that country. And we do need creative ways to move about it.

The prospect of the EU's continued enlargement has certainly helped to foster reforms in the EU's candidate countries so far. And this is why and we are pleased that Romania and Bulgaria are expected to join the EU as soon as the accession negotiations are completed. We are, of course, now waiting for a report from the Commission on the evaluation of status with these two countries. We are also pleased that accession negotiations have begun with Croatia and Turkey. However, just as with the expansion of NATO, any further EU enlargement we feel must be contingent on the individual performance of each and every candidate state. While the absorption capacity of the EU is an important factor to consider in the admission of any new members, at the same time we cannot hold the EU's aspirant countries hostage to the internal developments of the EU, especially in certain cases when engagements have been taken previously.

For Latvia, as well as rest of the EU, energy security has become a very important point on our agenda, a matter of extremely high strategic importance. By launching a common energy policy, the EU has taken the first steps to ensure the security of its energy supplies. Yet this policy still requires a more coordinated position toward third countries, as well as additional measures for increasing our energy efficiency, augmenting our reserves for crisis situations and certainly for developing alternative energy sources. At the moment, for instance, in Latvia we do not have the resources for storing large quantities of oil, we do have already huge underground gas storage facilities, which have already been used by

Russia for seasonal regulation of gas to that country. And these reserves will be capable of serving the energy needs of a number of European countries. But we have to look at energy on a continent-wise scale, we have to look at the energy grids in a long-term perspective, much as we want to win the next elections.

The EU's member states also need to establish a common EU policy on migration and we should agree on the general principles for the admission of immigrants. At the same time, each member state should remain free to decide on the number of immigrants it will admit. After all, each country is the best judge of its capacity of absorption. If the EU is to consolidate a safe and secure external border, then strengthening the administrative capacity of the EU's neighbouring countries should ultimately prove to everyone's benefit in the fight against illegal migration, organized crime and terrorism. Latvia, along with most of the EU's member states, does not support the creation of a global mechanism for coordinating migration activities. However, we do recognize the importance of the forthcoming UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. It is indeed vital to improve coordination between the various agencies and international organizations that deal with this very important and complicated issue.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

While security is a precondition for development, the converse is also true: development is essential for security. Only concerted international efforts will bring results in attaining the declared UN's Millennium Development Goals for reducing poverty across the globe and for promoting sustainable development. We certainly recognize the humanitarian and development needs of many regions across the globe, notably in Africa. Sometimes when I see people in Latvia complaining about how hard their life is and how we still have a long way to go to catch up with the standard of living in countries such as the UK, I do wish that some of them would travel across the globe and see what true misery can be.

There are other important issues, such as organised crime, illegal cross-border migration, disease, especially endemic disease, climate change and environmental degradation: they confront us all and we cannot escape them. For decades, the United Nations has been dealing with a number of these pressing concerns and it is no secret that the UN urgently requires sweeping reforms to function more effectively. Having been personally involved in this effort as one of the five Special Envoys of the Secretary General on UN reform, I have seen how despite the undeniable difficulties in reaching a consensus, significant progress has been achieved. It is now a matter of keeping up the commitment, keeping up the pressure for change and for reforms. The Human Rights Council, established by the General Assembly, will hopefully be an improvement on the previous Human Rights Commission. Of course, we will have to watch closely how it functions and how far it is an improvement. The Peace Building Committee should soon start to play an important role in achieving lasting peace in areas of continued strife and armed conflict. And, last but not least, I do hope that the Security Council can be successfully reformed in order to make it more representative of the current world situation, although clearly this particular aspect of the UN reform, I think is going to prove the most difficult of all and the most protracted.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We feel that every country, no matter how large or how small, can make a difference in the international arena. This does require a lot of hard work; it requires courage, including the courage to stand up for one's values even though one's commercial interests may sometimes dictate otherwise. While there may be a place for both *Realpolitik* and *Moralpolitik* in international relations, one should always recall the consequences of the temptation to trade off one against the other. As European countries with similar interests

and goals, Latvia and the UK understand the need for working together to strengthen their common agendas, without compromising the values that we stand for. Whatever the challenges that we have to face, I am an optimist. I think that we can face up to them, we can find creative solutions as long as we have a clear goal in mind, as long as we have commitment and indeed, yes, the passion, the passion that says: this is a worthwhile goal, it is worth striving for, it is worth the effort. Once you have that, I think lot of other things will become possible.

Thank you!