



## Latvijas Republikas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja Prezidenta preses dienests

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### **Address of H.E. Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga in the Ceremony of awarding the Three Star Order of the First Rank with a Chain to the First President of Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin on 22 August 2006**

Honourable Mr Yeltsin,  
Mrs Yeltsin,  
Honourable President Ulmanis,  
Prime Minister,  
Mr Brazauskas,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

During these August days we remember very significant events of the past and these fifteen years remind us about the events in August that changed the world to the best unlike the August days in 1939 which had very heavy and unpleasant consequences. There are moments in the history when changes with very long and far-reaching consequences take place, however they do not take place by themselves. There are always people who change the flow of history forever with their action, belief and interference.

The 20th century has been full of heavy experiences for all the European Continent; it has brought two bloody world wars as well as two very heavy tyrannies that have ruled over many nations and territories. However this heavy and hard century completed in its last decade with the events for which many generations will be able to be grateful for and enjoy. In this last decade of the 20th century the big giant on clay legs was ready for its collapse. However, there were still forces that would have liked to prop, mend and keep it. It was essential who would win at that moment because it was a fight. The forces which wished to change the history and implement freedom and democracy for many nations or the ones which wanted to stay in the same stagnation and had ruled since long already.

In this period one of the most visible persons was the President of the Russian Federation at that time, its first President Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin. In this politician all the world saw the man who had the understanding and far-sighted view on the development of history. Today with awarding its order Latvia would like to honour the politician who in his activity proved his understanding about international justice, about people's yearnings for freedom. He showed his understanding as a democrat, however more than anything else he demonstrated his manful courage in a threatening situation. It is easy to make the right decision in a peaceful situation when nothing threatens you, however to do it in front of weapon barrels and tanks is a completely different matter. The ironic and unforgettable view when President Yeltsin climbed a tank and young tankers showed that the armed forces were willing to serve freedom and democracy rather than tyranny flew all over the world.

The Latvian state is grateful to you, Mr Yeltsin, for your brave and principal position already during the bloody January events of 1991 when you urged the armed forces not to turn against the unarmed civilians. The Latvian state, the people of Latvia and all the democratic Europe will never forget that already three days after the Supreme Council of

Latvia had announced the end of the transition period and had enforced our independence *de facto* with a law you signed a decree – *ukaz* that recognized the independence of the Baltic States.

And I am very glad that the representative of our neighbouring country Mr Brazauskas is present here today as well as Mr Gorbunovs who was active in these processes. Those were historic events where all participants of which with their honest and just action have been written in the history forever.

Mr. President, in your person we see the man who, similarly like it was with the people in Latvia, wished to see independent states instead of the former Soviet empire, states each of which is prepared to fight for its future with their own forces, their own talents and resources. Therefore we also highly appreciate your willingness to sign an agreement with the presidents of all three Baltic States in Moscow which confirmed the withdrawal of the armed forces of the former Soviet Union from all three Baltic States. That was a fair and reasonable decision because now Russia, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania are neighbouring countries with a wish to live in concordance, peace and welfare.

We, Mr. President, just spoke also about what heritage the long years in the Soviet Union have left for us, the heritage that often creates difficulties for us when adapting to the modern life and modern world that is constantly changing. In the case of Latvia we had one of the priorities – to ensure that the Latvian language became the official one in the only place in the world where it is spoken. It means that for everybody who lives in Latvia it would be the main language of communication, however also from the very beginning Latvia recognized that the representatives of many nations with different ancestors live here with us and all of them are equally entitled and equally honourable in front of the law and in the perception of the state. The passports of the former Soviet Union were no longer valid for anybody as there was no Soviet Union any longer, which meant that these people had to complete formalities for the citizenship of the Latvian state. Those who had lived in Latvia before the occupation and their descendants were automatically awarded the citizenship. Others had to pass the naturalization process which we have tried to make increasingly more accessible and easier over the years and it presents neither humiliation, nor offence, it is simply a practical need. I as the President of Latvia would like to stress that although Latvia is the fatherland of namely the ancestors of the Latvians and Livs, for several thousand years we have been fully accepting also all others who live here and have chosen this their homeland as sons and daughters of Latvia and all of them are equally dear and valuable for us. Since the time of the Soviet Union many people of Russian nationality have remained in Latvia. We are glad at their contribution to our culture, economy and the good fame of Latvia. We are proud of their achievements in art and science; we are glad that are successful economically. We hope that the relations that govern within the European Union – that is the wish to live in friendship, dialogue, concordance and in searching a compromise – that such relations we can also develop with our big neighbour Russia. For the dialogue to take place contacts are needed and we are very glad, Mr. President, for the possibility to restore such a contact through your personality.

This day is mainly meant as a demonstration of the recognition and honour of Latvia to you. That is the Latvian way of thanking you for what you have done and committed in the history. Therefore I bid you to receive the highest award of Latvia – the Three Star Order from my as the President of Latvia's hands.