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Address by H.E. Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of Latvia, at the Riga Conference “Transforming NATO in a New Global Era”, 28 November 2006 (+sound recording/video)

Sound recording: Address of the President of Latvia at the Riga Conference 2006

Link to video: <http://www.rigasummit.lv/en/id/cats/nid/1021/>

Dear Mr. Liberatore,

Dear Mr. Kennedy,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is such a pleasure to see you again after that very exciting kick-off that we had last night and I hear that you already had an opportunity to engage in very vigorous debate during the Night Owl sessions. I trust that plentiful supply of coffee has been available this morning to make sure that we all are bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and ready to go on with this wonderful opportunity to exchange ideas. I once again express my heart-felt appreciation for all those who have helped to organize this conference: Žaneta Ozoliņa, who has worked very hard with all team and of course, our partners from the private sector, who have been so understanding, so far-sighted in supporting these programmes of public diplomacy. They are extremely important for an alliance that must rely on the support and the understanding of the populations. Any alliance, a military alliance is not just based on the military strength and capabilities, but also on the commitment of its citizens.

Last night we had really important and significant start to our debate in the presentation by Senator Lugar and the discussions that followed, I think followed up on these essential aspects. The first being energy security, which is increasingly turning into both a political and a security issue, not just one of economics. The second is NATO's growing partnership with those countries that are still waiting at the door and have expressed an interest either in ultimately becoming members or collaborating more closely with NATO and in particular specifically these are the Ukraine and Georgia. And also a third aspect among others, the important decisions to be taken about NATO's role in the Middle East.

There are a number of other important issues that will have to be addressed at this conference and that will be touched upon at the Summit itself. This includes the establishment of closer partnerships with non-NATO members, the challenges faced by NATO in Afghanistan, the Alliance's future role in the Balkans and, of course, the evolution of NATO's relationship with Russia, which is still something that is in the process. The value of conferences, such as this one, that are bringing together really some of the brightest minds who have turned their attention to matters of security, not just in their own country, but on international scale, is of tremendous importance. And I am deeply convinced that the results of your deliberations will be noted and discussed and taken into account by those who take decisions. And for me as President of Latvia it is particularly gratifying to see the extraordinary high intellectual level of those present here, the broad range of experience that you carry, each of you, with you. A dream of mine would be to have Riga as the venue for regular intellectual meetings, where questions either of security or other

matters would be discussed, say, once a year, every year. We will not have NATO Summits regularly, it will be a while before we have another. But I think it would be wonderful and it is a dream of mine if we could have intellectual conferences in Riga every fall. And I think that would be a great contribution, again, from our part and yours.

The conference that we are currently engaged in, has been very aptly named in terms of situating NATO and its activities in the global era that is one of change, continuous change and rapidly increasing change. There really is an acceleration process that we are faced with. The Alliance itself in its 57-year history, of course, has been going through change through the years, it is not as if it was something new to it. At the very beginning, the very first steps were, in point of fact, still tainted by the positioning that we had in the Second World War and in the early days there was even some reluctance about the role that West Germany might play in such an Alliance. Very quickly as the Cold War developed, it became clear that there was a dividing line in ideology, in attitude, in governance and the whole concept of what governance was all about, between the Communist world and the free world. And the imperialistic and expansionistic intentions of the Communist block became the threat that NATO then very clearly was created to counter and to defend the countries that were members. I think the Alliance had been remarkably successful in achieving that goal of protecting its democracies that it is all the more remarkable that it was able to do so over so many decades without firing a shot in its own defence. However, the end of the Cold War, has, of course, re-positioned countries, certainly on the continent of Europe, and generally in the world there has been substantial and important changes taking place and that has been the time for the last 15 years for NATO to reconsider its *raison d'être*, its manner of being and its goals and aims for the future.

It is not just Europe that has been changing radically in the last few years. It is the whole world that is seeing constant transformations, a great many of them of the kind that even the highest specialists and cleverest of Communists, had not really foreseen. The rise of terrorism, the scope of terrorism, the way that terrorists are able to engage and to recruit increasing numbers of people who are totally committed, the form of terrorism that includes suicide bombings or suicide actions, has never before been seen on such a scale. The increasing reliance on the narcotics trade as one that is linked with illegal arms trade, is an alarming thing. And of course for many countries in some parts of the world that have the benefit and you might think the advantage of having important valuable, natural resources, the possession of such natural resources have actually been a bane rather than a blessing, because it is precisely in those places that you have seen war-lords rising against the elected governments and where you have seen the greatest civil instability. So that we have developed over the years an unexpectedly large number of rogue states where in a course of time we would have rather expected to see an improvement in governance and a spread of stable civil control over the military and over the structures of the country, especially when you consider the enormous amounts of money that had been distributed world-wide in support of various projects, both by the United Nations, by the European Union and a great many countries, each in bilateral donations and relationships.

But turning now back to the Alliance and to questions of defence, it is very clear that over the decades it is the dynamic flexibility of the Alliance that has allowed it to maintain the central role in international security architecture. It could never have done it, if it had remained fixed and unmovable and unchanging. It has been adapting, it has been changing and it has been evolving. During the 1990s, NATO's military interventions, although belated in some cases, did effectively help to stop the blood-shed and the fratricide that was taking place in the Balkans. The fact that this very NATO summit is taking place here in Riga is another vivid illustration of how rapidly and how profoundly the world has changed in the past 15 years and that on the scale of history is but a blink of an eye.

Very few, and I say, even the most learned of Communists would have imagined that 10 former captive nations of the Warsaw pact would accede to the opposing Alliance and rejoin Europe's family of democracies in such an extraordinarily brief time. We have moved

in that period from decades of bi-polar confrontation of the worst sort to a more complex and inter-connected system. But of course, it is an inter-connected system world-wide, where any crisis, any complications or difficulties anywhere in the world can become an issue for all the rest of us, wherever we may be. That is clearly one reason why the democracies of Europe and of North America must maintain and strengthen the special relationship that they have established over the last decades, through such international organisations as the NATO Alliance. And indeed, if from my own personal experience, I am a person who just with my own English accent, I situate myself somewhere in mid-Atlantic, neither entirely North American and not entirely British, I think that the concept of trans-Atlantic co-operation is not a new one, I think it goes back a very long way to Lafayette going to the United States and helping them with the revolution, it goes back to the First World War and the Canadian and American troops who came to help keep Europe free and of course continued throughout the Second World War. It is a long tradition of co-operation, these are not empty words and an empty concept, it is based on a very long tradition of co-operation and one that is truly based on common values, on common understanding about liberties, about what democracy is about, what it means to live in a free and open society.

During these past years a great many people have benefited from the global changes that have taken place. Naturally there have also been unfortunate side-effects and unintended consequences. One example is the situation in the **Middle East**, where instead of improving it looks rather worse than it did a few months ago, with sectarian violence again spiralling out of control in Iraq, with Lebanon apparently on the brink of another civil war, a very fragile ceasefire in place between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and with violent Islamic extremism gaining ground in a great many countries, including a number of NATO's own member States. And we do see in a lot of countries proselytising by extremists, who try to recruit, to recruit young people with their ideology and this is something that I think we seriously have to address, the content of this attraction, the attraction to violence, the attraction to extremism, I think that the psychological roots of it is something that we have not given a sufficient attention to. But the net result of it all of course is that these adverse developments can be felt thousands of mile away from the direct zones of conflict, and the increasing tension brought about by Islamist terrorist attacks is contributing to an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion between groups belonging to different religions where, of course, we are not really talking about doctrinal differences, we are not back in the Middle Ages, at least some of us are not, in terms of theological disputes as to how many angels sit to the right hand of God and how many on the left side, but it is being used for creating hatred and animosity and engaging into violence and the sad part is that it is not a confrontation between Christians and Muslims and Jews as such, when we see so many parts of the Islamic world actually engaging in the same sort of intolerance and extremism one against the other. I think religion is being used as a cover, it is being misused and the activities undertaken truly have nothing to do with faith.

These challenges that we are facing world-wide, we all share them in various degrees and, of course, there is no simple solution to them. But if we are to address them effectively, then clearly we can do so better by pooling our resources, by pooling our understanding of the situation and then working together on developing long-range strategic plans and then short- and middle-range tactical decisions. As far as NATO is concerned, what we do require is comprehensive and concerted action in a great many areas between the members. We need facilitated exchange of information among the security structures of all the countries concerned, and certainly there is a necessity of broadening NATO's **cooperation with other countries and international organisations**, including the United Nations. Now, it is quite true that NATO was founded as essentially a defensive and a military Alliance, but it is impossible to conceive in the modern world a military alliance simply going out into the world with military action, without consideration of the society in which it intervenes and without consideration of what the basis are, what the grounds are for building up a civil society in the places where hopefully we are trying to help these populations reach such

goals.

NATO has been changing and one of these changes has extended its interest as far as Africa. The relationship, the working relationship with the African Union has helped that body to **expand its peacekeeping missions in Darfur by providing airlift for additional AU peacekeepers and by training AU personnel.** Now this is a very delicate situation, where the government of Sudan has even refused to admit United Nations' troops and clearly the presence of NATO troops, for instance, from the Northern hemisphere, would not be palatable to a continent, which has keen memories of the periods of colonial occupation and not to mention the period of slavery. But training facilities, collaboration in terms of missing elements of infrastructure, with their help and on their invitation, it seems to me are crucial in being able to intervene where intervention is necessary and stopping bloodshed, where it should not be tolerated to go on and on. I firmly believe that new forms of cooperation need to be pursued at this very summit with countries in other parts of the world that do share our vision and our values – such countries include Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea and here again, we are not talking about a NATO that should be bloated and extending world-wide, that is not the point. The point is that a strong alliance, that is able to have co-ordinated and clear co-operation with other partners who are willing and able to intervene in certain regions - this cannot possibly weaken NATO, quite the contrary: if we are, for instance, to intervene effectively in Afghanistan, and if we have partners from the Eastern part of the globe, from where we stand, then it only relieves the pressure on NATO members for their commitment, for their costs and for their manpower and military resources. It can only be of mutual benefit, so therefore this is something that we should address and to develop mechanisms of co-operation without necessarily, that is not the point at all, of becoming the world's policemen.

Afghanistan obviously is on the agenda. It represents one of the most serious challenges for NATO today. It is the first country where NATO has undertaken sustained ground combat operations and where some of NATO's member States are experiencing the most intense fighting since the Korean War and where some are expecting the first casualties since the Second World War. Under a legitimate United Nations' mandate and at the behest of a democratically elected government, NATO has undertaken the unenviable task of stabilizing a weak country, whose ungoverned territories remain to this day breeding grounds for terrorists, and where drug production and trafficking are increasing at an alarming rate.

So far, from the military point of view, NATO's operations in Afghanistan have definitely been successful. However the brunt of the fighting has been borne by just a few countries, mainly the United States, Canada, Great Britain, the Netherlands, as well as our non-NATO Australian partners. Other NATO members have troops there but have imposed caveats on the use of them and on the use of their equipment, this at a time when NATO's commanders on the ground urgently require additional manpower, urgently require supplies and NATO cannot afford to lose this crucial struggle against the regressive forces of a resurgent insurgency by being indecisive or lacking commitment. If we fail in our mission in Afghanistan, then surely the Taliban and al-Qaeda will return to power, it will embolden Islamic extremists elsewhere in the world. And that is the scenario that surely we would not wish to see come true.

So it is a matter for all members of the Alliance to display the political will necessary to come up with a resolve required to ensure the success of our mandate in Afghanistan. And yes, here again, it is one of those situations, where we know very clearly that a purely military solution will not suffice, it will not provide the necessary stability to a country that has been suffering from nearly continuous warfare for the last 30 years. If we are to succeed in this extremely important mission, then we must work together with other international organisations. And this includes the European Union, the United Nations, the World Bank, many other non-governmental organisations to help improve the lives of ordinary Afghans

and to reduce their daily plight. Because, unless we also engage their hearts and minds, the military successes will evaporate and not leave any lasting consequences. This means that increased reconstruction and development must go hand in hand with the military operations of the Alliance, if we are to see a lasting and permanent result to our efforts.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Enlargement is another important aspect of NATO's continued transformation. Let us think back for a moment on the doomsday scenarios that we heard in the mid 1990s that came from various quarters. We heard that enlargement might upset stability on the continent, that it would destroy age-old balances and add liabilities rather than assets, to the Alliance. And we have seen the result and it is very much the contrary: since the last two phases of NATO's enlargement, we have seen continued reforms in the new member States, we have seen increased stability in Central and Eastern Europe. The NATO's new members are making meaningful contributions to NATO's operations. And, of course, the very fact that this 2006 NATO Summit is taking place here in Riga demonstrates Latvia as a new member's firm commitment and investment in the Alliance's future. We are after all a country of slightly less than 2.3 million inhabitants, but believe me, all of us are deeply committed to our membership in NATO.

I have absolutely no doubt that it was in the best interests of the Alliance to enlarge it, to enlarge it to the east in 1999, in 2004, and I firmly believe that it is still in our best interests to continue this process once the remaining aspirant countries are deemed ready for accession. We note that Croatia, Albania and Macedonia have been making considerable progress towards receiving an invitation, and of course we look forward to 2008 as the year when important decisions will have to be taken on that regard, including decisions about potential admission of new members. However, in order to ensure long-term stability in the Balkans and in Europe as a whole, we must enhance our cooperation with all other countries that are willing and able to pursue a relationship of engagement with the Alliance.

This is why we in Latvia consider that the gradual deepening of NATO's relationship with Georgia and Ukraine is essential for the democratic development of these countries and for achieving long-lasting stability in the south-eastern part of Europe. It is very clear that having a democratic, stable and prosperous Georgian state is in everyone's best interests. This is why I believe that the Alliance should help Georgia to achieve a peaceful resolution of its outstanding territorial issues. Georgia has just received an Intensified Dialogue status with NATO two months ago and this on the basis of very substantial and significant progress in the reforms it has undertaken and I am certainly hopeful that this Intensified Dialogue will encourage Georgia to continue energetically with its reforms and will bring it ever closer to the Alliance with the help, of course, of the current members.

Ukraine is an extremely important country in this part of the world and Ukraine has been working towards closer relations with NATO for a number of years. Clearly we cannot rush our Ukrainian partners, but we should help them in those areas where our assistance and our involvement are requested and are welcomed, be it in providing information on NATO to their general public - who after all, have been fed for the decades with propaganda saying that NATO was a very dangerous enemy - be it in developing civilian control over the military or in carrying out or continuing with the important reforms that they still need to do. This may not be a simple and straightforward and rapid process, but the important thing is that NATO's doors must remain open to all aspirants that meet the Alliance's standards and this should be made clear by the current NATO members that we do maintain an open-door policy as a fundamental principle. This would be an incentive to our neighbours to continue with their reforms, so that they too can attain the security, stability and the prosperity that they too fully deserve.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Besides remaining open to further enlargement, NATO needs, as I stated before, to build **closer partnerships not only in Europe**, but also elsewhere in the world. I already mentioned Africa, the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific region, where a number of countries are willing and able to cooperate with us much more closely. They share our values, they appreciate the security-enhancement activities that NATO has undertaken outside of Europe. And I would hope that these symbiotic relationships can grow closer in the coming years.

The evolution of NATO's relations with **Russia** presents a continued challenge for the Alliance. The Rome accords created the NATO-Russia Council as a forum for both sides to work together on issues of mutual interest. I hope that this dialogue is reassuring Russia about the Alliance's internal development and external relationships, for it is surely in Russia's interests as well to uphold and strengthen international security, and to have stable and prosperous neighbours at its borders. Ukraine's and Georgia's interest in establishing closer ties with the Alliance does not hinder Russia's ability to work closely with these countries as equal partners and we have heard declarations, both from Ukraine and from Georgia that, of course, they still consider Russia as an important partner with whom they would like to have meaningful partnership relationships. NATO is already cooperating with Russia in countering the spread of narcotics from Afghanistan; still more should be done to improve this NATO-Russia relationship. For instance, we would very much welcome Russia's ratification of a long overdue agreement on military training and joint exercises, this among other things.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We live in an interdependent world where the international community must rely on multilateralism to address the threats and challenges that we all face together. NATO's cooperation with the European Union will be essential for addressing such non-traditional security challenges as **energy security**. Energy can indeed be used as a tool for producing economic wealth, but it can be misused as a coercive instrument by energy suppliers to exert political pressure on energy-consuming nations and at that point it can become a security issue as well. As Senator Lugar correctly stated yesterday evening, NATO's member States need to work together to ensure a safe, continuous and sufficient supply of energy for their present as well as for their future needs.

I'm sure that you will agree, ladies and gentlemen, that NATO also needs the capability to respond in a timely and effective manner to **emergency situations** in any part of the globe. That is why the members of the Alliance must pool their efforts to ensure that the **NATO Response Force** can be deployed with a minimum of delay in future operations – be they humanitarian or military. If we look at the immediate future, then I believe that NATO should seriously consider the merits of deploying the NRF in support of the Alliance's ongoing stabilization efforts in Afghanistan.

My own country, Latvia, for instance, has reserved a highly experienced unit of Explosive Ordnance Disposal specialists who have taken part in extensive operations in Iraq, the Balkans and Afghanistan where they have been truly useful. However, since the Alliance has not decided to use the NRF in Afghanistan, we cannot send this EOD unit to that country because it would breach our obligation to the NRF and then we are faced with situation that we have this highly trained and very useful EOD unit, but clearly it cannot be in two places at once and this is where we have to decide on our priorities. We should ask ourselves whether it is the best solution to put our best-trained and best-equipped personnel on hold for some future, unknown mission, at a time when our troops in Afghanistan are in need of even greater support. Of course, we also have to decide that we need sufficient forces on hold for our own territorial defense, these are the sort of decisions, very important ones, that we have to be making.

This NATO Summit in Riga will also discuss other initiatives for expanding NATO's crisis management capabilities, such as multinational logistics, strategic airlifts for the transport of troops such as the NRF. One priority clearly lies in sharing the costs of acquiring such urgently needed strategic lift aircraft such as the C-17. And I am very pleased to see that multi-national co-operation initiatives are now on their way and yesterday I had the pleasure to visit with great interest one such C-17 aircraft which is on display at the Riga Airport and had been flown in specially for this Summit.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have no doubt that the agreements achieved today and tomorrow here at the Riga Summit will have to be followed up with allocation of the **necessary financial resources** for their successful implementation. In other words, NATO's member States will have to commit their money behind their stated intentions. And therefore the stated aim of reaching at least 2% of the GDP for defence I think remains an extremely valid one. This is what will ensure us to have capable forces with the right equipment and so that the costs of running this organization are distributed fairly across all the members. In our own case, we hope to attain a defence budget that corresponds to the 2 % of GDP over the next year or two and that has been a political commitment to maintain it at that level over the course of the next years at least.

You are here in Latvia, a country that over the last fifteen years has undergone incredibly deep and profound changes from being a captive nation of the Soviet Union to now being an independent and sovereign nation, full member of the European Union and of NATO. By doing this and joining these international bodies, we have, of course, assumed new responsibilities and we are fully aware that in today's globalised world, no one can afford to be concerned only about the narrow confines of one's own country or one's immediate neighbourhood. This is why we are fully supportive of international outreach that NATO has undertaken as a basic policy.

To conclude, maybe with just three key-words to keep in mind, I would say, the three E-s:

We need an efficient alliance – capable of taking rapid decisions, naturally based on common understanding of what the goals and how to achieve them;

We need an effective alliance – equipped with the necessary military means for tackling the international challenges of our day; and

we need an engaging alliance – one that is focused not only on providing security to its own member States, but on propagating international security through engagement to its aspiring members and through cooperation with like-minded partners elsewhere in the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, you stand here in the country that is where it is because its people had a dream, they had a clear goal and they were ready to work for it. If NATO as an alliance is able to formulate a clear goal, a clear aim and if all of us, apart from the practicalities of daily life and commitment and running our countries and our militaries, are also able to raise our sights and have a dream about of the kind of world that we want to live in, then I do think, we can make a difference. That is the ultimate message: what we do and what we dream does make a difference. I wish you well!