



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

Speech by the President of Latvia in honor of the 85th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Latvia and the United States

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

As Latvia's head of State, I am honored to be here in Washington to mark the 85th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Latvia. The foundations for the relationship between our two countries were put in place already in December 1918, barely a month after Latvia declared its independence. Despite the fact that Latvia was still under foreign occupation, the US Senate passed a resolution expressing support for the secession of all three Baltic countries from Russia. The US government officially recognized Latvia's independence in July of 1922, which marks the beginning of diplomatic relations between our two countries.

The first US envoy to serve in Latvia arrived in Riga in November of 1922. During the inter-war period, the relations between our two countries grew closer and several bilateral agreements were signed.

These relations were abruptly severed, however, in 1940, when the Soviet Union occupied and annexed the Baltic countries. The US reaction to this act of aggression was swift. In July of that year, the US Undersecretary of State, Sumner Welles, released a statement that strongly condemned the Soviet occupation of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. This statement set the course for the US policy toward the three Baltic countries and ensured that the Baltic diplomatic missions in the United States continued to operate during the next 50 years. We are grateful for the fact that the United States never officially recognized the Soviet violation of our sovereignty. Thanks to this policy of non-recognition, the absolute majority of Western democracies also never recognized Latvia's illegal occupation.

Throughout the years of occupation, the Latvian Legation in Washington continued to represent Latvia *de jure*, thus preserving Latvia's international legal status in its struggle to regain its liberty. Close cooperation between the Legation of Latvia in Washington and the US Department of State in 1989 led to the first unofficial contacts between the US government and Latvia's transitional government in 1990. The US and Latvia renewed their diplomatic relations on September 5th of 1991.

Prior to the Second World War, Latvia welcomed such prominent Americans as Herbert Hoover, who visited Riga in the 1930s and wrote an impressive article praising Latvia's development, as well as a young John F. Kennedy, who visited Riga on the eve of the war, while he was studying in London.

Since the restoration of Latvia's independence we have welcomed two sitting US presidents, William Jefferson Clinton and George W. Bush, the latter two years in succession. These visits have been of great significance, for they affirm that the US views Latvia as an equal partner, and are a sign of the United States' continued commitment to the formation of a democratic, united and secure Europe.

Latvia views the United States as one of its most important allies and partners. Our two countries are continuing to expand their bilateral relations, while participating jointly

in broader regional activities, such as the international peacemaking efforts in Iraq and in Afghanistan. We are maintaining a regular dialogue on such important issues as energy security, the fight against terrorism and the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction. I express the hope that a visa-free regime will soon be in place between Latvia and the United States, as this would further strengthen the already friendly relations between our two countries and promote even closer bilateral cooperation at various levels.