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Speech of the President of Latvia At North Atlantic Council meeting Istanbul, June 28, 2004

It is with great emotion that Latvia joins the nations sitting around this table. Our country, 60 years ago, saw two totalitarian armies marching across its fields, we saw unbelievable loss of human life and we saw suffering. We have had half a century of totalitarian oppression, but we have longed for liberty. We have achieved it and now our aim is to maintain it and to protect it.

Sitting here as a representative of Latvia around this round table, with you, representative of the other nations, I feel safe and secure and I can say so in the name of my people. That sense of solidarity, of mutual support is crucial to us.

We have known what it means to lose one's liberty, one's freedom and one's sovereignty. We have known what it means to have our country erased from the maps of the world and our flag disappeared from the international scene. We are back, we would like to stay back and we thank you for accepting us in your midst.

We look forward to the security that NATO provides; and for us it is not theoretical, it is not illusionary, it is very real.

We stand ready to contribute our part to the collective security. And I can say with assurance that per capita of inhabitants, per capita of the income of our inhabitants, we are one of the significant contributors to the collective security effort.

We encourage the initiatives that NATO is taking to re-formulate its mission, to re-structure its activities to become an alliance that is able to face every possible threat that the world can offer us.

We have faith in the Alliance, we have confidence in the Alliance, we are ready to contribute to its transformation, to the extension of its activities, we fully support it and we will do our part.

There is a great deal to be done. The Secretary General and others have outlined the details, we all know them. Let us get to work and let us make the world a better place.