



Latvijas Republikas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja Prezidenta preses dienests

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Address by H.E. Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, at a luncheon hosted by H.E. Dr. Edward Fenech Adami, Prime Minister of Malta, Valetta, February 17, 2004

Mr. Prime Minister,

I would like to begin by thanking you on my own behalf, on behalf of my husband, Professor Imants Freibergs, and on behalf of the entire Latvian delegation for the very warm welcome that we have been receiving here in Malta. It is a genuine pleasure to be in this wonderful country in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, which is called by its residents so poetically, this sweet land (*Din l-art helwa*[*din l art helva*], *the first line of the Maltese anthem, written by national poet Dun Karm*).

Sea routes and navigation have played a decisive role in the history of both the Latvian and Maltese nations. The strategic location of Malta in the very centre of the Mediterranean, the convenient geographic location of Latvia on the crossroads of trade routes on the Baltic Sea, have for many centuries tempted foreign powers to covet and conquer our two small territories.

The 20th century finally led to the independence of our countries, although the paths by which we obtained our freedom have been different. Latvia and Malta can now fully benefit from the advantages of their geographical positions, from their ports and from their accumulated seafaring traditions. I believe that this common situation provides a sound footing for the establishment of even closer relations between our countries.

Upon ones arrival in Malta, one is astounded by this small island nations abundant cultural wealth, which is embodied in various architectural monuments preserved from truly pre-historical times dating back thousands of years. The ancient temples of Malta (*Hypogenum, dated 2500 Before Christ, the megalithic temples*), as well as the capital city Valetta, where every stone breathes history, have been internationally recognized as world heritage sites. Already, the number of Latvians who arrive here to discover more about the cultural and historical treasures of this fabulous Mediterranean island is increasing every year.

I hope that soon Latvia will also be welcoming an increasing number of visitors from Malta. Maltese tourists will find a country and culture that is also enchanting and alluring. The historical centre of Riga, with its narrow, medieval cobblestone streets and unique Art Nouveau architectural monuments, is a UNESCO world heritage site. And Latvia is one of the few countries in Europe that can still boast of unspoiled, natural forests and beaches.

I have heard that the Maltese like to sing, and that they have rich and interesting traditions of oral folklore. This is one more thing that unites us, as we, Latvians, like to call ourselves a nation of singers. We take great pride in our folklore traditions, and particularly in our folk songs. The Latvian Song and Dance Festival, which gathers hundreds of thousands of people, has been recognized a unique masterpiece of non-material human culture. No nation is small in its wealth of history and culture. By sharing this wealth, it is not depleted, but only enlarged.

Mr. Prime Minister,

On May 1 of this year, Latvia and Malta will become equal partners in the European Union. This will be a time of great celebration for both of our countries, after the hard work accomplished during the accession process. It will also mark the beginning of a new stage in our countries relations. New opportunities will arise for strengthening the bilateral relations between Latvia and Malta in economics, culture and other areas, as well as within a larger framework, particularly concerning the common interests of the European Unions smaller member States.

I would now like to raise a toast to the well-being of Malta and Latvia. To a growing friendship between our nations, and to our successful cooperation in the future. To the health and happiness of Prime Minister Edward Fenech Adami and Mrs. Fenech Adami. To the health and happiness of the hospitable people of Malta.