



Latvijas Republikas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja Prezidenta preses dienests

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Address of the State President at the annual meeting of the Canadian International Development Agency

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to address you here today, and extend my deepest appreciation to the people of Canada for the Canadian International Development Agency's support to my country during its transition period. It is a pleasure to see that this year, the Central and Eastern Europe Branch of CIDA has chosen Latvia as the location of its annual field representative meeting. I am convinced that this meeting will present a valuable opportunity for Canada to strengthen its links and partnership with Latvia and her two Baltic neighbours.

For decades, CIDA has supported sustainable development activities in order to reduce poverty and to contribute to a more secure, equitable and prosperous world. CIDA has been providing valuable support to Latvia in various fields, particularly in the context of EU pre-accession, social integration, and the reform of Latvia's legal, judicial, health and social security systems. CIDA's World Trade Organisation support project is one of Canada's latest initiatives in the Baltics, and I am confident that it will serve well in strengthening Latvia's and Lithuania's efforts to reform their trade regimes in compliance with WTO norms and practices. Other successful examples of CIDA's support to Latvia include assistance to the Riga Business School and the Translation and Terminology Centre, as well as projects concerning criminal justice reform and the UNDP's Latvian Language Programme.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thanks to the steadfast support of Canada and other friends of Latvia, my country has managed, within the short span of a decade, to make a remarkable transformation from a captive nation with an inefficient, communist economic system to a free and democratic republic with one of the healthiest and fastest-growing economies in Europe.

Last year Latvia's GDP grew by over 7 percent, which was one of the best indicators on the continent. Latvia continues to have promising perspectives for sustained long-term economic growth, thanks to the strong performance of numerous sectors of its economy. A steady influx of foreign investment, along with the continued improvement of Latvia's business environment, should further help to ensure this.

I am confident that these factors, along with the prospect of EU and NATO membership and joint work within the WTO, will render Latvia's relationship with Canada even closer than it is at present.

Recently the bilateral relations between Latvia and Canada have been developing at a dynamic pace. Several Canadian companies have already discovered that Latvia presents an emerging market with interesting opportunities for business and trade. The Canadian Baltic Express trade mission has already visited Latvia twice, and in 2000 the Canadian-Latvian Business Association was established in Riga. At the end of this month the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in co-operation with Embassies of three Baltic countries in Canada, will hold a round table discussion in Ottawa on the promotion of trade

and business relations between Canada and the Baltic countries.

These welcome events indicate that we are about to enter a closer, long-term and mutually beneficial relationship. Once again, my thanks to everyone here for their interest in Latvia, and to CIDA for its outstanding work both in Latvia and elsewhere in Europe. I wish you a productive and successful meeting during your stay here in Riga.