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Address by the President of the Republic of Latvia, H. E. Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, at the Mayoralty of the City of Dublin, 5 June 2002

Honourable Deputy Lord Mayor,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a genuine pleasure for me to be visiting Ireland and its ancient capital, Dublin, which is truly one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. I express my thanks to the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Councillor Michael Mulcahy; to the representatives of the Dublin City Council; and to all of the residents of Dublin for the warm welcome I have received here.

It is an honour to be in the historical Mansion House, which has been at the centre of events in the history of Dublin and Ireland, and which was the location chosen for the convocation of the first Dail.

Dublin is known throughout the world for its hospitality, vivacity and rich traditions in art and literature. At the same time, Dublin has succeeded in capitalizing on the opportunities of this day and age, and appears well-prepared for the challenges of the future.

A significant challenge lies ahead for both Ireland and Latvia in the very near future: that of ensuring the successful, continued enlargement of the European Union. I am confident that this process of European unification will bring our countries, cities and people closer together. At present Latvia is still a EU candidate country. But I hope that by next year, Latvia will be among those countries invited to join the EU. We wish to be equal partners with Ireland and the other EU member states in a Europe whole and free, and as such I hope that we will get to know each other much better during the coming years.

Ireland and Latvia already share close economic ties. Although Ireland, like Latvia, is a relatively small country, it is the 13th largest investor in Latvias economy. Last year the total volume of foreign trade between our countries exceeded 40 million USD, and I hope this figure will continue to increase. Several satisfied Irish entrepreneurs have already acquired a feel of the dynamism and potential for development offered by Latvia and the Baltic Sea region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although Ireland and Latvia are both coastal countries, neither of our nations is located at the outer fringes of Europe. We belong to one region of the globe. We belong to the same continent. We are eager to promote increased cooperation between our countries through cultural events, educational exchanges, and economic development projects in particular.

Europes continued integration offers new opportunities for economic contacts throughout the continent, as well as access to an expanded market that soon will include more than 450 million people. Riga, Latvias capital city, is already experiencing one aspect of European integration in the form of significant development projects, particularly in the spheres of transport and infrastructure. These will soon bring Riga and Latvia even closer to the rest of Europe. Rigas port, along with the port of Ventspils further west, are among Northern Europes leading transit centres, with enormous potential for increasing the

already large volume of trade between the EU and Russia. Last year Riga celebrated its 800th anniversary, and marked a glorious past as one of the Hanseatic Leagues most prosperous and dynamic cities. Last year Riga also offered the opportunity to appreciate Latvia's cultural heritage as a European Culture Capital. I am very pleased that the Mayor of Riga, Mr. Gundars Bojrs, could accompany me on this state visit to your beautiful country and capital city.

Both Riga and Dublin have served for centuries as cultural, arts and literary centres. Dublin can take pride in a history that goes back over 1000 years, and in having been the home of many outstanding authors, not least of whom, James Joyce.

I am confident that the friendly ties that we are establishing here today will lay the foundations for a new and better Europe without wars, conflicts and artificial borders. I extend my best wishes to you, Lord Mayor Michael Mulcahy, and to the kind and hospitable inhabitants of Dublin. May your city continue to thrive and flourish for many years to come.