

Remarks on Being Presented the Order of Three Stars, First-Class in Riga, Latvia

May 7, 2005

Madam President, I gratefully accept. I am so honored and so thrilled to be here in your beautiful country.

I was telling the President that it's such a joy to come to a country that loves and values freedom and to be in the presence of a President who speaks so clearly about the need for people to be free and her recognition that a free world will yield peace.

And so, Madam President, thank you for your hospitality, and thank you so much for this great honor. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:55 a.m. in the Hall of Coats and Arms at Riga Castle. In his remarks, he referred to President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia in Riga

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*President Vike-Freiberga.* We are, of course, very gratified at this sudden interest in Latvia that we're seeing among the journalists. [Laughter] And it's truly a great pleasure to see these wonderful journalists coming to my country and having a look around. And, Mr. President, I think that you have something to do with that. [Laughter]

*President Bush.* Well, thank you for having us, Madam President. It's been a trip I've really been anxious to fulfill. I admire your leadership; I admire your country's courage. I love the fact that you're a free nation and willing to speak out so clearly for freedom. So, thanks for the hospitality.

*President Vike-Freiberga.* And we're pleased that the cameras are now turned on Latvia while you are here. [Laughter]

*President Bush.* That's right.

Q. Mr. President—

*President Bush.* Thank you all. We'll have ample opportunity in an open press conference. And I certainly wouldn't want you to fire your best question here. [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 11:10 a.m. in the Golden Hall at Riga Castle. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

The President's News Conference With President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia, President Arnold Ruutel of Estonia, and President Valdas Adamkus of Lithuania in Riga

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*President Vike-Freiberga.* Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming to this joint press conference of the three Baltic Presidents and the President of the United States of America. We have just had a meeting together and the most fruitful discussion about our transatlantic relationships and also on the relationship between the two institutions of which Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania have become members since the past year, the relationship between NATO and the European Union.

We are honored and pleased to have this opportunity to have a great leader from a great and powerful country come to our region and show interest in what happens here and to have this open and very frank debate with the three Baltic Presidents. With this, I pass the floor to the President of Lithuania, President Valdas Adamkus.

*President Adamkus.* Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, this was an extremely good meeting and at a very good time. We are welcoming the President of the United States here; as I said, welcome back to the shores of the Baltic Sea. And it was during the discussions we really touched on vital issues: the relationship between the United States and the European continent as—in a whole. We touched on issues concerning directly the relationship between Baltic States and, of course, on the global issues.

On the part of Lithuania, I have reassured the President that we are staunch allies in a fight against terrorism. We will be standing shoulder to shoulder on general global issues concerning the humanity and especially in an event when we are celebrating the end of World War II against—the victory against nazism and, at the same time, standing for the principles which are

dear to the rest of the world community, principles of democracy, protection of the human rights, principles of free expression.

And there was total agreement, and I can reassure the President of the United States that we will be standing and defending the rights of the people, even those neighbors who are still—for them, democracy is a dream. And by standing and speaking freely, and I would say, introducing some kind of a dose of oxygen into the resistance and opposition which is striving for those same rights we are enjoying, we will definitely defend and make a better world, looking into the future.

And I am grateful to the President for his presence here in the Baltic States, his inspiration and strength for all of us to continue our commitments. Thank you, Mr. President.

*President Vike-Freiberga.* President Ruutel.

*President Ruutel.* Honored colleagues, esteemed press, I'm very happy about today's meeting, and the high-level contacts between our countries have produced very essential and fruitful cooperation. The will and desire with which the United States has supported the endeavors of our people have proven to be very fruitful.

It has already been a year since we have become members of NATO and the European Union. Today's meeting once again reaffirms the deep friendship and the strong relationship between our countries.

We were talking about the means with which we can help democracy, peace, and welfare to other countries, which some countries do not enjoy even in the 21st century. We reassure you that Estonia is willing to share its experiences with these