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Week Ending Friday, May 13, 2005

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. at Riga Castle. In his remarks, he referred to President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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

May 7, 2005

President Vike-Freiberga. We are, of course, very gratified for 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. at Riga Castle. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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

May 7, 2005

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 countries that are going towards these goals.

I want to thank those soldiers from Estonia and the United States who are now fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo. Estonia is very satisfied with the progress made in Ukraine and Georgia and is prepared to continue supporting their endeavors.

We also talked about our relationship with Russia in our discussions. Not only Estonia but in the interests of all countries, it is best to have as a partner a stable and democratic Russia who shares our values and is open for constructive cooperation.

Although we talk primarily of the future, we must realize that the analysis of the past is essential for future relationships between countries. We are celebrating the passing of 60 years from the end of the Second World War and the defeat of nazism. But this victory did not bring freedom and democracy to many peoples, and of course I mean the Baltic States, who lost their independence for a long period of time. And I would especially like to emphasize the United States' role, who never recognized the occupation of the Baltic States.

The efforts of the United States and the Baltics allow us here in Riga today to celebrate the victory of freedom. Our people are working together in the transatlantic sphere and throughout the world. Thank you for your attention.

President Vike-Freiberga. Questions? No. First, we have President Bush, who would like to make a statement. [*Laughter*] I think maybe company from across the ocean should be given a chance to make a statement as well. [*Laughter*]

President Bush. It's kind of dangerous—as you know, I'm a little long-winded. But thank you, Madam President. Thank you for hosting Laura and me and my delegation here to Latvia. The hospitality has been tremendous, and we really thank you.

And it's such an honor to be standing here with the leaders of three close allies and friends, such incredibly important symbols of what freedom can mean to this neighborhood and to countries in the world. And so we—

we're proud to be here with you all, fellow members of NATO.

One objective of my trip is to honor the memories of those who sacrificed 60 years ago in the struggle against nazism and fascism. Tomorrow I'll be in the cemetery in the Netherlands to pay tribute to a generation that was willing to sacrifice for freedom and peace. But I recognize that in the West, the end of the Second World War meant peace, but in the Baltics, it brought occupation and Communist oppression. And the American people will never forget the occupation and Communist oppression of the people of the Baltics. We recognize your painful history.

I want to congratulate our friends and allies who stand here with me on the progress you've made in the past decade. You see, one of the important examples of these three countries is that not only have they become free societies, but they've learned to adapt to the conditions of a free society. It's not easy to go from communism to democracy, and yet, these three nations have shown the world how to do so, and we congratulate you on your good, hard work. Your economies are flourishing; people are allowed to express their opinions. As a result, you've been readily accepted into NATO and now the EU. And the world is better off because of the hard decisions your Governments have made.

I also want to thank you for your hard work in helping democracy spread in the neighborhood. We had a really good discussion today about Belarus. We talked about the Ukraine and Georgia and Moldova. We talked about Russia and the relationship between the Baltics and Russia. These three nations have also recognized that those of us who are free have a responsibility to help others be free outside of our neighborhoods. And I want to thank you for your contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan. To this end, I discussed my request for the U.S. Solidarity Fund—my request to the Congress for the U.S. Solidarity Fund to help these nations who have deployed troops to be able to better afford those deployments.

We talked about bilateral relations as well. As you can imagine, one topic that came up with all three leaders was visa policy. I talked about the way forward to make sure our visa policy works well with our friends and allies. Part of the issue, of course, is that in the past—we've looked to past history to determine future visa policy, and now we've begun to change looking at the past. In other words, the overstays during occupation must be viewed differently now that the three countries have been freed. And we look forward to working with you on the way forward to reasonable and fair visa policy.

There are thousands of people in my country who have come from your countries. They send best regards. And I say to you, thank you for being such good friends and colleagues, and thank you for your hospitality again, Madam President.

Now, if you'd like to do something—[*inaudible*]. [*Laughter*]

President Vike-Freiberga. Thank you for that statement, Mr. President.

We do have a limited time at our disposal, and I understand that the framework is to be one question to each President. So we'll start with a question to President Adamkus.

President Bush. Or you have four Presidents to me—questions to me, if that's what you would like.

President Vike-Freiberga. There's a question out there.

Belarus

Q. Yes—[*inaudible*]—from Lithuanian Television. Actually, I have a question to President Bush.

President Bush. Yes, I thought that might be the case. [*Laughter*]

Q. Regarding what you said recently, that democratic Belarus is also in Russia's interest, can there be a deal between Washington and Moscow whereby Russia would make sure that President Lukashenko is not reelected next year, and in return, Washington would encourage or would hail the democracy there but turn a blind eye on the continued Russia's influence there? Or are you prepared to go all the way?

President Bush. No, that's an interesting question: Can you make a deal to determine somebody else's fate? I think that's what we're lamenting here today, about what happened to the Baltics—you know, kind of one of those secret deals amongst large powers

that consigns people to a way of government. No, we don't make secret deals. The only deal that I think is a necessary deal for people is the deal of freedom. They should be allowed to express themselves in free and open and fair elections in Belarus.

And that's—and as to whether or not it's in Russia's interest that democracies be on her border, absolutely it's in Russia's interest that she have friends and have neighbors who are democracies. We're used to that in America. We've got democracies on our border. And it's a blessing to have democracies on our border. We don't always agree, by the way, with our friends on our borders, but we are able to settle disputes peacefully because we are democracies.

And so I will continue to speak as clearly as I can to President Putin that it's in his country's interests that there be democracies on his borders. I mean, after all, look at the three nations here. These are peaceful, prosperous nations that are good neighbors with Russia and good neighbors with each other and good neighbors elsewhere as well.

Estonia-U.S. Relations

President Vike-Freiberga. A question from the Estonian side.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—I have a question to Mr. President Bush, but it's in Estonia language.

[*At this point, the reporter continued in Estonian.*]

President Bush. All right, I need the English translation. Start over.

Interpreter. For Estonia, it's very important to have good relations with the United States, and right now the relation has been very good. Which ranking would the relations of Estonia have in American foreign policy today and also in the future? Thank you.

President Bush. Say that again. I'm getting kind of old, and I'm having trouble hearing.

Interpreter. I would like to know what is the ranking today and in the future in American foreign policy, the relations with Estonia? What is the ranking?

President Bush. Now that the President's standing here, very important. No—[*laughter*]—look, I don't think a President can rank, but a President can praise, and I praise Estonia for being an open-market economy that is a free society. And therefore, if you're a free society that embraces market economies, you'll rank very high with me and the United States.

The example of the Baltics is so vital for countries who are emerging from tyrannies to—and oppressive governments to free societies. It's really important. And that's why the active participation of the three leaders here in helping NGOs and civil societies develop in new democracies is vital, because who has got more credibility with leaders in new democracies than the three leaders here, who have had the experience of helping a democracy emerge?

And so you rank very high, as far as I'm concerned, as participants in the freedom movement, the ability to inspire by example and lend expertise because of the experience you've had.

President Vike-Freiberga. Thank you very much. A question from the Latvian side.

Democracy in Eastern Europe

Q. My question goes to Mr. Bush.

[*The reporter continued in Latvian, and his question was translated as follows.*]

Interpreter. Today, during negotiations, you talked about the relationship with Russia. Did you talk about the possibility of asking Mr. Putin to recognize occupation of the Baltic States in Moscow? You have, of late, so strongly supported the attempts of the Baltic States to explain their history. Do you expect anything to come of it? Thank you.

President Bush. My position on that issue is very clear and has been clear about the occupation. And the position of my country has been clear about the occupation ever since the occupation took place. We proudly flew the flags of independent nations above your Embassies in Washington, DC, and the statement was clear: We never recognized nor accepted the occupation that did take place.

I think this moment in history will be—give everybody a chance to recognize what took place in the past and move on. And look, I fully understand there's a lot of anger and frustration involved in the three Baltic countries about the occupation. I expressed that

to President Putin, but he didn't need me to tell him. He fully understands there's a lot of frustrations and anger about what took place.

My hope is that we're now able to move beyond that phase of history into a phase that is embracing democracy and free societies. These are extraordinary times that we're living in, and the three Baltic countries are capable of helping Russia and other countries in this part of the world see the benefits of what it means to live in a free society.

And so we have a great opportunity to move beyond the past. Again, I repeat to you, I recognize the painful history, and my hope is that we're able to learn the lessons from that painful history, that tyranny is evil and people deserve to live in a free society.

As I'm going to say in my speech a little later on here, I'm going to say, "Never again should we allow Jews and Gypsies to be exterminated and the world not pay close attention to it. Never again should we let—shall we tolerate tyranny and subjugating people to incredible death. We have an obligation as free societies never to forget that history and to do something about the possibility of that arising again."

And so, I am inspired by the example of the Baltic nations. I'm inspired by your courage of the past and your determination to move forward in a free society.

Jennifer [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press].

Q. Russia has expressed some displeasure with your travel itinerary, stopping here——

President Bush. With what, now?

Q. Russia has expressed some displeasure with your travel itinerary on this trip, stopping here in Latvia and going to Georgia——

President Bush. Yes.

Q. There's also some criticism that the U.S. is behind the revolutionary change in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. What do you say to talk that the U.S. is inappropriately meddling in the neighborhood?

President Bush. Oh, no, I thank you for that. First of all, this is not my first trip to the Baltics, and hopefully, it will not be my last trip to the Baltics. We've got good friends here. And as I travel around the world, I like to touch base with our friends.

Revolution—I think you said the word "revolution"—freedom is universal. Freedom is etched in everybody's soul. And the idea of countries helping others become free, I would hope that would be viewed as not revolutionary but rational foreign policy, as decent foreign policy, as humane foreign policy.

I repeat to you that I think countries ought to feel comfortable with having democracies on their borders. After all, democracies are peaceful countries. Democracies don't fight each other, and democracies are good neighbors. You know, it's amazing how far this continent has come because of the freedom movement. Sixty years ago—it's really not all that long ago in the march of history, is it? It's pretty long if you're 30 years old, like you are, but 60 is not all that long for an old guy like President Adamkus. [*Laughter*] But now we're standing here talking about other parts of the world taking for granted that Europe is whole, free, and at peace. It shows how much life has changed as a result of people embracing an ideology that encourages peace.

And we now have the same opportunity, this generation has the same opportunity to leave behind lasting peace for the next generation by working on the spread of freedom and democracy. And the United States has got great partners in doing what I think is our duty to spread democracy and freedom, with the three nations represented here.

And so my trip here, Jennifer, is to say as clearly as I can to the people of these three great countries, "Thank you for your sacrifices. Thank you for your courage, and thank you for your willingness to elect people who are willing to spread freedom and peace around the world."

May God bless your countries, and may God continue to bless mine. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 2:40 p.m. at the Riga Latvian Society House. In his remarks, President Bush referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia. A reporter referred to President Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus. President Ruutel spoke in Estonian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

The President's Radio Address

May 7, 2005

Good morning. On Sunday and Monday, I will attend ceremonies in the Netherlands and Russia to commemorate the 60th anniversary of V–E Day.

These events will celebrate a great triumph of good over evil. We will never forget the acts of courage that made possible the liberation of a continent or the heroes who fought in the cause of freedom. And we honor the brave Americans and Allied troops who humbled tyrants, defended the innocent, and liberated the oppressed. By their courage and sacrifice, they showed the world that there is no power like the power of freedom and no soldier as strong as a soldier who fights for that freedom.

The defeat of Nazi Germany brought an end to the armed conflict in Europe. Unfortunately, for millions of people on that continent, tyranny remained in a different uniform. In Latvia, where I'm also visiting on this trip, free people were taken captive by another totalitarian empire. Germany was split into free and unfree halves. And countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary were cut off from liberty by an Iron Curtain. The people of these countries survived the cold war through great courage, and then they took history into their own hands and reclaimed their freedom.

The result is, the continent of Europe, wounded by decades of conflict and oppression, is today whole, free, and at peace for the first time in its history. The wave of democracy that swept Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 has now swept to nations like Georgia and Ukraine. And the victory for freedom represented by V–E Day has become a reality for millions of people.

On my trip, I will visit Freedom Square in Tbilisi, Georgia, to applaud the people there for the Rose Revolution that advanced democracy in their land. Georgia has survived oppression, fought for liberty, and taken its place among free nations. America is proud to call Georgia our partner in freedom, and we will help the people of that country enhance prosperity, improve security, and spread liberty at home and abroad.

The new democracies of Europe still have much work to do. Free elections are a significant achievement, yet they are only part of a fully functioning democracy. Democratic governments must be committed to providing full and equal rights for minorities, resolving conflicts peacefully, encouraging a vibrant political opposition, and ensuring the rule of law. As the nations of Central and Eastern Europe work to build up the institutions necessary for a free society, America will stand by their side.

Today, these nations are standing with us as we defend liberty abroad. Freedom has no better friends than those with a fresh memory of tyranny. That is why countries like Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Georgia have been partners in our coalition in Iraq and Afghanistan. We're grateful for their contributions and especially for the example they are setting for other aspiring democracies.

America and these new democracies are bound together by history, by the universal rights we have defended together, and by our deepest convictions. All of us understand that the advance of freedom is the concentrated work of generations, from the brave Americans who fought against Nazi Germany 60 years ago to those who struggle for liberty today. And by working together, we will ensure that the promise of liberty and democracy won on V–E Day will one day reach every person and every nation in the 21st century.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 2:55 p.m. e.d.t. on May 5 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. e.d.t on May 7. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 6 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. Due to the 7-hour time difference, the radio address was broadcast after the President's news conference and before his remarks in Riga. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks in Riga

May 7, 2005

Sveiki Draugi. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the warm welcome. Madam