

## **“Lithuania on its way to a United Europe”**

Address by Mr Antanas Valionis,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania  
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Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to thank the hosts of this event for an opportunity to speak before so distinguished an audience. I am happy and honoured to be in your beautiful country on the first official visit of a Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. I today had fruitful discussions with Prime Minister Mr Juncker, Deputy Prime Minister Ms Polfer, and other Luxembourg officials and have come to better know your country and your people.

I cannot help but reiterate that, indeed, small is beautiful. Luxembourg is an example of what a small country in a united and peaceful Europe can achieve. The processes taking place in the new, more closely integrated Europe have not threatened the identity of the country. On the contrary, the rallying-cry of the Luxembourg people, *Mir wellen bleiwen wat mir sin*, or “We want to remain what we are”, is powerful today as it was when it was first coined. We hope and trust that the people of Lithuania will cherish the same feelings when we return to the community of truly equal European nations.

### **Foreign-policy priorities**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am happy to note that cooperation between Lithuania and Luxembourg is developing at an accelerating pace. Prime Minister Juncker came to Lithuania in April of this year and during his visit we spoke of the need to deepen our relations. My visit here is yet another sign that we wish to enhance these relations. More could and should be done to expand our trade volume and to foster cultural links and people-to-people contacts. I agree with Prime Minister Juncker that our two nations have yet to discover each other. I think that this discovery is the most fascinating aspect of European integration. I also sincerely hope that the much talked-about “common European future” will never be a merely abstract notion but rather come to signify a “joint venture” of many dedicated individuals and nations, an intricate jigsaw puzzle with hundreds of colourful pieces waiting to be put together one day.

No wonder then that accession to the European and trans-Atlantic institutions remains at the top of our foreign-policy priority list. The only other equally important priorities are cooperation with neighbouring countries and countries in the region as well as promotion of trade and economic ties abroad. This set of priorities has won support from all major political parties in Lithuania.

### **European Union**

Over the recent years globalisation has attained considerable proportions and the related problems can no longer be solved by individual nations alone. It is no accident therefore that Lithuania sees EU membership as an opportunity to promote its interests in a joint effort with other nations which share the same values and goals. EU membership is also a powerful vehicle for fostering reform and advancing prosperity inside Lithuania. The idea of lagging behind in the European integration process has no appeal to us.

Lithuania made an official application for EU membership on 8 December 1995 and started accession negotiations on 15 February 2000. The government of Lithuania has a clear target date for accession: 1 January 2004. To meet the target, we need to conclude the negotiations, sign the Accession treaty, and complete the ratification process, both in Lithuania and in the EU. Over the last six months or so my country has made a real breakthrough in negotiations and has caught up with the group of candidate countries which started negotiations in 1998. As of today, Lithuania has already closed 17 out of 31 negotiating chapters. Only two chapters – “Justice and Home Affairs” and “Institutions” – remain to be opened.

We believe that negotiations should follow the principle of differentiation and catch-up ability. There should be no artificial grouping of countries. Real progress in negotiations only should determine when a country is ready to conclude negotiations. It must be a question not of “When did you start?” but rather of “How did you perform?”.

The major Lithuanian political parties subscribe to government strategy regarding EU membership. A statement was issued to that effect on 19 January 2001, which provided for a fast-track adoption of a number of necessary laws in Parliament. Also, a special parliamentary commission to prepare amendments to the Constitution was set up.

The EU Summit meeting in Göteborg confirmed that the Union would be ready to accept the first new members in time to participate in the 2004 elections to the European Parliament. We welcome this commitment for it is very much in line with our national strategies and timetables.

Lithuania also followed attentively the Nice Summit which started a new debate on the future of the European Union. We launched internal discussions on the matter to be prepared for the Laeken Summit later this year and the IGC in 2004. We are involved in these discussions not only representatives of the government but also members of political parties, academic institutions, interest groups and civil society. Active participation in the discussion makes citizens feel party to the integration process, informs them and keeps them involved.

We believe that discussions on the future of the EU should be closely linked with the enlargement process. EU reforms should be carried out with the goal of making the enlarged EU operable and functional and they should involve all Member States in the decision-making process. EU Member States are already in the habit of discussing and seeking solutions together. This gives me assurances that the enlargement process is irreversible.

As concerns the common foreign and defense policy, Lithuania welcomes the strengthening of European crisis-management capabilities and has pledged its contribution to the Rapid Reaction Force at the November 2000 Capabilities Conference. We also intend to contribute to the EU Civil Crisis Management Capacity. At the same time, we hope that the strengthening of European defense will not proceed at the expense of transatlantic links. We believe that NATO is and should remain the cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic security.

## **NATO**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I come now to the next strategic priority of Lithuanian foreign policy: our country’s membership in the Alliance. The 1999 Washington Summit recognized Lithuania’s effort in seeking Alliance membership by naming Lithuania a candidate country. We will seek to be invited to join the

Alliance at the 2002 NATO Summit to be held in Prague. We also hope that Luxembourg will support Lithuania's aspirations for membership in the Alliance.

We in Lithuania consider further NATO enlargement a historic opportunity, a necessary step towards eliminating the anachronistic dividing lines in Europe. NATO enlargement will extend the zone of peace, democracy and stability in Europe, will make the Alliance stronger and more cohesive, and Europe more secure.

In seeking membership, Lithuania faces two key issues: first, the "homework", second, gaining the political support of the NATO member states. If we manage to implement these two tasks, we stand a good chance to be invited to join in 2002.

In keeping with its commitments, Lithuania has allocated 1.95% of its GDP for defense spending this year and will seek to increase this percentage to 2% in 2002. On the other hand, the preparedness and professionalism of Lithuanian officers has been demonstrated time and again in joint missions with NATO in Bosnia and Kosovo. These are valid examples of our country's readiness and willingness to contribute in real terms to European stability.

Last year Lithuania initiated the so-called "Vilnius Nine" process – now "Vilnius Ten" – which aims at securing regular political and practical cooperation among the ten NATO candidates as they prepare for membership. We act as partners, even if we all agree that each candidate country should be judged on its own merits and on its readiness to assume the obligations of membership.

The spring session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly which took place at the end of May in Vilnius reconfirmed strong support for future NATO enlargement and the right to pursue a membership application without any third party having a right of veto. It called upon the Alliance to issue its invitations to European democracies no later than 2002.

Lithuania welcomes and supports the clear commitment of George W. Bush, President of the United States, and Alliance members to continue NATO enlargement for the purpose of creating a prosperous, complete and free new Europe. Lithuania is persuaded that the invitation of the US President to "extend our hands and open our hearts to new members, to build security for all of Europe" will be realised by inviting Lithuania to join the Alliance in autumn 2002 in Prague.

Somebody is surely thinking: "And what about Russia's concerns?" We are convinced that Baltic membership in the Alliance will not pose any threats to other countries in the region, including Russia. The goals that enlargement pursues – democracy, reconciliation in Europe, an extended zone of stability – are as much in Russia's interests as they are in the interests of Europe and America. The so-called "zones of influence", the grey zones, or no-man's lands, instigate only instability and suspicion. A secure and prosperous Lithuania will make a good neighbour and partner for Russia.

As a NATO ally, Lithuania will be among the outspoken supporters of a comprehensive and open dialogue between the Alliance and Russia. It is hardly possible to shape the future of Europe and the entire Euro-Atlantic space without Russia.

At times we hear that the Baltic States should be admitted into the EU on an accelerated track in order to satisfy their basic security needs, and that our NATO membership can wait, perhaps indefinitely. We in Lithuania do not accept this argument. NATO remains the bedrock of European defense. No-one in Europe suggests an EU role in collective defense. Furthermore, no EU Member State which is also a NATO member has so far opted out of the Alliance. We consider the two institutions as complementing but not substituting for each other. Lithuania's choice is to be part of both. It is our right to choose, to apply and to be considered for membership.

## **Good neighbourly relations**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is our view that you cannot strive for Euro-Atlantic integration without maintaining good neighbourly relations. Here there are two directions to follow: Baltic and Nordic cooperation to the North and cooperation with the like-minded nations of Central Europe to the South.

In recent decades Lithuania has developed close and mutually beneficial relations with its Baltic partners, Latvia and Estonia. The three countries enjoy unprecedented free trade. Common interests in the development of joint infrastructure projects found a vivid expression in the extensive renovation of the Via Baltica highway. We coordinate the operation of our electricity grids. We put significant effort into increasing transit efficiency through implementation of the Common Transit Procedure. We have been working on the creation of a common education space. Military cooperation is best exemplified in the BALBAT, BALNET, BALTRON, BALTDEFCOL, etc. projects. We may not yet have created a “Baltic Benelux” but accomplishments to date are truly significant.

Nordic-Baltic cooperation took on a new quality recently, testifying to the increased confidence and understanding among our nations. Traditional “Five plus Three” cooperation was transformed into “Nordic-Baltic Eight” cooperation which includes Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. To illustrate Lithuania’s economic ties with Nordic countries, I might point out that Nordic investments by the end of the year 2000 made up 41.7 per cent of total direct investment into Lithuania.

This year we mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Poland. The strategic partnership which has evolved between Lithuania and Poland in the past few years is an outstanding example of historic reconciliation, a clear demonstration of how common goals and objectives outweigh past ills.

An important instrument of wider regional cooperation is the Council of the Baltic Sea States, unique in that it involves EU Member States, EU applicant countries, Norway, Iceland and Russia. CBSS has been successful in addressing issues of common concern and in effecting consolidation of regional policies in response to the true needs of the respective societies. Active involvement of the CBSS in implementation of the EU Northern Dimension reflects its flexibility and operability. Lithuania attaches great importance to this initiative. Lithuania’s input – for example, the well-known Nida Initiative – includes a number of common projects involving the Kaliningrad Region and Poland and fits well into the overall cooperation framework of EU-Russia relations.

We welcome the latest European Commission report on the Kaliningrad Region. The document to a large extent echoes the Lithuanian experience in dealing with the Region and is very much in line with Lithuania’s approach to the issue. Our efforts to have Kaliningrad included in EU-Russia dialogue have brought success. We now talk openly about cross-border issues, energy and fisheries, transit of goods to and from Kaliningrad, etc.

Lithuania is working to make the Kaliningrad Region a region of opportunity and a model for wider cooperation between Russia and an enlarged EU. We recommend further exploration of ways to ensure the proper functioning of the Kaliningrad Region after EU enlargement and of ways to prevent its isolation. On a practical level, Lithuanian exports to the Region grew by 11.3 per cent last

year. 400 Lithuanian joint ventures involve Kaliningrad and Lithuanian investments total 12.8 percent of all investments in the Region.

Bilateral Lithuania-Russia relations are based on the principles outlined in the Treaty of the Foundation of Inter-State Relations signed on 29 July 1991. Importantly, the 1991 Treaty *inter alia* recognizes the right of the two countries to join the security alliance of their choice. This was reiterated during the most recent state visit to Russia of the President of Lithuania, Valdas Adamkus, on 28-31 March 2001.

We have with Russia over 30 treaties and agreements in political, economic, legal, military, social, cultural, transport and other areas. Ratification by the Russian Duma of the treaty on national borders and an agreement on the avoidance of double taxation would for all practical purposes complete the legal framework of our relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are aware that our foreign policy objectives are ambitious. We would like to see our Continent, afflicted in the past century by two terrible wars, become a region of peace, stability, and prosperity. Lithuania can contribute to this great project by promoting regional cooperation, expanding trade and helping to bringing peoples and cultures together. We believe that only by resolving problems comprehensively, that is, by integrating nations, will it be possible to attain to real security and well-being in Europe. We have a historic opportunity to once and for all change the face of Europe. I am confident that we shall seize the opportunity.