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## LITHUANIA ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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Ladies and Gentlemen!

In a few years, Lithuania will celebrate her own millennium—a written testimony in European annals a thousand years ago about a country under such name.

Thus, before talking about the forthcoming thresholds, I would like to refer to what Lithuania is and where she is.

There were many attempts to tear Lithuania from the map and from history. But she continues to exist at the same place on the Eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. It is not a simple existence for her, but action and creation, which are worthy to present here, telling you about Lithuania's role in Europe yesterday, as well as today and tomorrow.

This role was determined in part by geography and other circumstances, but, in great part, it was also determined by the political and cultural determination of Lithuania's rulers.

Western civilization has been the fundamental pillar and the main direction of self-determination of Lithuania since the mid-13th century, when Mindaugas, the first king of a united Lithuania, accepted a crown blessed by the Roman Pope. Alas, the King was killed by his pagan relatives. His son avenged them and afterwards retreated to an Orthodox monastery, where he also was killed.

So, for a hundred and fifty years more, Lithuania, the last pagan state in Europe, was balancing and struggling, having the will to accept Western Christianity, but not the power of Western conquerors. This goal, i.e., a Christian but not an enslaved state, was attained in the late 14th to early 15th century. Soon afterwards, Lithuania became a promoter of Western Christian civilization in the Eastern Slav territories ruled by her. In the towns and villages of present-day Belarus, there can still be found Baroque churches and remnants of Catholic cloisters and Jesuit colleges, and knowledge about the estates of Lithuanian nobles with manufactories, theaters and orchestras. The code of laws, entitled "The Statute of Lithuania," was first approved by the Parliament of Noblemen in Vilnius in 1529 and was later twice revised and amended for the following editions. It appeared earlier than similar codes for Russia and Poland; hence the Lithuanian statute was widely accepted and used. Lithuania was promoting the uniate (or Greek Catholic) church and, later, was traversed by the Reformation. Finally, in 1791, the "Two-nations Republic" of Poland and Lithuania adopted the first constitution in Europe. It reflected the ideas of the Enlightenment and the Declaration of Human Rights, the bourgeoisie got their rights without any violent revolution. Unfortunately, the neighboring empires of Russia, Prussia and Austria could not stand for this. The Polish-Lithuanian confederation was partitioned and annihilated without having had enough time to accomplish its reforms or to pool its strength.

The 19th century was a trying ordeal for Lithuania. Under ferocious repression, hard labor and gibbet, and under social and cultural oppression, it had to safeguard its identity. The test was unbelievable, but the people passed it. Reborn, a nation state after World War I, the Republic of Lithuania was again joining European civilization and political structures. Its accession to the League of Nations was complemented by rapprochement with Latvia and Estonia (Finland was considered a fourth Baltic state), sister states which endured the same fate. Before world War II, the idea of "Baltoscandia"—a broader idea of the Nordic Dimension appeared on the horizon. Unfortunately, relations with Poland remained frozen for eighteen years in a state of war after Poland forcefully took Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. Lithuania recovered Vilnius after the defeat of Poland, right before the annihilation of Lithuania itself. Lithuania was again occupied and annexed in the

summer of 1940 by the same old Russia, which had renamed its Empire the Soviet Union in the 20th century. Once more, decades of resistance and repression followed. Once again, the occupiers were attempting to deprive Lithuania of her identity, cutting her away from Western civilization—not only politically, but also culturally.

It is interesting and important to note that, despite their forced unification into the USSR, three countries—Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia—managed to preserve a certain difference (from Russia) and a mutual solidarity and affinity. This helped us to consolidate our political and moral efforts in the 1988-1990 march towards a peaceful restoration of independence.

It was natural that in the spring of 1990, after the newly elected Parliaments of the three countries had, in one way or another, declared independence, the Council of the Baltic States was established straight off. It revived the tendency of the Baltic Concord of the three prewar countries, and the valuable idea of "Baltoscandia"—the above-mentioned broader northern regional unity. Simultaneously, there was interest in the structural experience of Benelux. Already in June 1990, the Council of the Baltic States applied to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for guest status for its three countries; and that autumn, together with the Nordic Council delegation, it signed a communiqué on cooperative relations with the Nordic Council. In the spring of 1991, the leaders of the Baltic states took part as guests in the session of the Council of Benelux. While in the spring of 1992, the Baltic Assembly endorsed an agreement on parliamentary cooperation with the Nordic Council. Thus it became possible to take concrete steps in seeking to create our own little "common market" (visa-free entry, customs union), and the three Baltic States on the eastern coast embarked upon that.

Lithuania's activity to normalize relations with more problematic neighbors was even more successful; agreements or declarations, which she jointly signed with Russia (29 July 1991), Belarus (24 October 1991), and Poland (13 January 1992) consolidated peace and opened up new perspectives for regional and European cooperation. One could, after all, define the turning to the West more accurately as a reintegration, a return to a cultural space traditional for Lithuania.

Eight years have passed since the liberation of Lithuania and the end of the first stage of her European reintegration. This first stage was the period from 1990 to 1992. In 1993 Lithuania, together with Estonia, was accepted into the Council of Europe and helped Latvia, Moldova, the Ukraine, and the countries of the Southern Caucasus to be accepted too (after we defended in Strasbourg, in cooperation with other countries, the right of the Caucasus to belong to Europe). In 1991, Lithuania was the first to recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, and make her contribution to the extinction — transformation to democracies—of the minor empire of Communism in the Balkans. Today, Lithuania herself is in the region. Together with a unifying Europe, she guards the Balkan peace.

Lithuania has always been open and constructive in her foreign policy. The Northern Dimension, the unity of the three Baltic States, was extended with the Western Dimension—neighboring Sweden, and the Southern Dimension—neighboring Poland. Following Lithuania's suggestion in 1997, a Lithuanian-Polish Parliamentary Assembly was established, which, in turn, intensified the bilateral cooperation of the two cabinets. The common objective—to belong together to the European Union and NATO—consolidated bilateral relations between Poland and Lithuania as a strategic partnership. There is no secure Poland without a secure Lithuania. This is obvious to anyone who recollects or looks at a map. Supported by Poland, Lithuania strives for NATO membership, in order to extend slightly the Euro-Atlantic space of stability and welfare in 2002—this time towards the North. Everyone knows that investment capital likes secure places. That is why we speak about NATO welfare.

This modern Lithuanian-Polish pragmatism is strengthened by the historic memory of the existence of the two nations in a commonwealth from the end of the 16th to the end of the 18th century. The rapprochement between Lithuania and Poland is now in this new context of a unifying Europe. We categorically decline the idea that Lithuania and Poland should be divided by any kind of "red" or Molotov line.

After having made the difficult decision last year to gradually decommission her nuclear power plant, Lithuania was invited to enter into direct negotiations for membership in the European Union. According to expert assessment, Lithuania has a chance to catch up with those candidate countries, which had started negotiations for membership a bit earlier. The newly elected Seimas of Lithuania adopted a resolution on 26 of October this year, which confirmed the determination of the state to be prepared for EU membership by 2004, as well as an invitation to NATO in 2002. For the latter, we have a Membership Action Plan and for the former, we have the status of associated membership, which means, I expect we're already in. The efforts of CIS leaders to stop it should be compared with territorial claims to European Union. (See the Statement of the Lithuanian Seimas of June 15, 2000).

Having reinforced partnerships and strategic relations with her northern and southern neighbors, Lithuania became a connecting line between the eastern Baltic countries and the Vyshegrad countries. Lithuania is active in the Council of the Baltic Sea Countries thus contributing to the opening of the western regions of Russia to European cooperation. Here the urgent problem of the present status and the future of Kaliningrad-Königsberg comes into force. This is a European problem, and a problem of the future relations between the European Union and Russia, while the people of that region look for greater autonomy and beneficial solutions. Lithuania displays real goodwill by granting a visa-free entrance right for the residents of this region, by training its officials, and by making investments. 75 percent of last year's investments there were made by Lithuanians. In the process of European integration, it would be detrimental and ludicrous to leave the Kaliningrad-Königsberg region lagging behind in indigence, as a hotbed of anachronistic anti-Western militarization,

environmental contamination, AIDS concentration and social instability. For what purpose should they suffer? People in the Kaliningrad-Königsberg region really need assistance, and Lithuania provides it.

Another western neighbor—Sweden—makes solid investments in Lithuania, extends nongovernmental relations and assists in national defense. Sweden has nothing against Lithuania's membership in NATO, since it will only add security to the territory, waters, and investments of the Swedes themselves.

Belarus is Lithuania's neighbor to the East. Although Lithuania does not support the domestic policies of the present regime in Belarus, she maintains a constructive relationship with this country. We share a long land border and have rather extensive trade and transit relations. With Belarus's political integration into Russia, it would be politically easier to say that Moscow is to be held responsible for what happens in Minsk. If Moscow really preferred that the situation in Minsk be different, it would be different. Lithuania, however, treats Belarus as a state (or its regime) that is responsible for itself and, therefore, opens for it some window to Europe, thereby carrying out an individual international mission of this nature.

Nevertheless, it is not that easy. Lithuania still continues to be Europe's "contact person" in its relations with Belarus, despite certain unfriendly actions, for instance, the appointment of a war criminal of the 1991 January killings to the Belarus government and the regretful failure of our neighbor to accept the European and US proposals for holding democratic elections.

Beyond Belarus, there is Russia, and Russia is hardly predictable. Our relations are good, because numerous essential issues were already resolved between 1990-1992, when Russia itself probably considered that it would have been better to become a democratic and European-type country shortly.

Both countries resolved many differences in that period: they signed and implemented treaties on the fundamentals of interstate relations and the withdrawal of Russia's military troops. In the first treaty, Russia condemned the annexation carried out by the Soviet Union against Lithuania and agreed that Lithuania could freely choose the international security structures and alliances with which she wished to be associated.

Ever since Lithuania, however, chose integration with the North Atlantic Alliance as her national aim, Russian politicians have forgotten about the signature of their President. They pretend to be angry, and exert pressure against and intimidate both Lithuania and the West. This is just one of the difficulties that we encounter in the second stage of national self-determination.

Even if our trade and transit conditions were recently made more difficult by the Russian side, when Russian politicians want to press the Latvians and Estonians, they say that they feel best in Lithuania, when compared to the other Baltic States.

We neither count nor define the small problems, yet two big ones will be solved either by time or by Russia's political progress.

These two problems include the unwillingness of the Russian leadership to see Lithuania join NATO and Lithuania's desire to talk with the Russians about the damage caused by the USSR occupation.

So, during the last decade, being "independent again" (which is the title of my book presented here today). Lithuania went the way towards her national goals NATO and the European Union, as a creative, cooperative and contributing member of the regional community of nations. The "Second Europe" was being consistently created here, in advance to joining EU, and the time was spent not in the waiting-room, but in the working room.

Today, when we are swimming ahead in a little bit warmer Post-Cold War era, with the local war luckily finished in the Balkans, but still waged in the Caucasus, the Europe of the democracies combines in itself an eagerness and a frustration about its enlargement. Similar feelings, supposedly, may accompany the forthcoming enlargement of NATO. My name for NATO is United Democracies, and Lithuania from 1992 was resolved to be "in."

Lithuania is an advanced applicant and candidate to join NATO. Here, in the US, firm opinions exist about her being number one or number two on the list of candidates. Therefore, swords will be crossed around her and also inside her. The Russian political elite, with its prevailing mentality of yesterday, will insist on allegedly heavy "confrontation" and will seek out more "Russia-firsters" in the West, at the same time encouraging an anti-Western, anti-NATO and antimilitary approach in Lithuanian society. ("You yourselves will not want this membership," so the Russian ambassador in Vilnius explained to us his government's recent tasks and expectations.)

Nevertheless, a possible division of our citizens into "pro-Russian" and "anti-Russian" groups would be neither correct nor fruitful.

A lot depends on what Russia you have in mind. Is it that problematic "Russia of yesterday" or is it that democratic Russia of tomorrow that is desired by all of us in the West? Do you prefer the renewed Russian expansionism westwards,

expressed by a desire to make satellites of or "Finlandize" the former Baltic colonies, or would you prefer Russia's accommodation to reality, its ability to be cooperative indeed?

In a similar way, we must elaborate and establish for ourselves an ideology of the benefits of cooperation between Russia and NATO. What we must emphasize are the benefits for Russia itself. The Russian political elite and military establishment both angrily protested against NATO actions toward the Belgrade regime. Nevertheless, the burden of Milosevic now seems to be lifted. The situation became easier for everybody. The Balkan Peace (called Balkan Stability Pact) will now work for Yugoslavia and, indirectly, for Russia, because the burden of its responsibility has diminished.

The membership of both Poland and Lithuania in NATO will work positively for Russia, first of all, in the psychological sense of accommodation and reconciliation. Of course, it is better for Russian foreign policy to work without the burden of old temptations. If Lithuania is able to contribute to reconciliation between Russia and NATO, exactly via her membership in NATO, it is a big deal, a new beautiful page of history.

Russia (i.e., its present authorities) tries to exert influence on other states so that Lithuania would not be invited to join NATO in 2002 or ever. However, Russia has no valid and, especially, no pragmatic arguments. Since real arguments are not talked about openly in diplomacy, invalid ones in this case include an alleged "danger" to Russia from NATO and the Lithuanian side and a presupposed "right" to control the countries that were formally "republics" of the USSR.

The negotiations on the payment of damage caused by the USSR occupation (which Lithuania strives for at the moment) will govern the last problematic issue of bilateral relations and simultaneously eliminate any of the claims of Russia's "rights" in relation to formerly occupied Lithuania. It will be totally absurd to call Lithuania a "former Soviet republic" in tackling an issue such as damage caused by the Soviet occupation.

As far as real dangers to Russia they originate neither in the West nor from NATO, Fighting a nonexistent Western danger, Russia only wastes its time. Therefore, Lithuania's invitation to NATO does not manifest any hostile action against Russia (no matter how its diplomats interpret it), but serves as an encouragement to face reality rather than live in the myths of the past. I wish to emphasize again that Lithuania's contribution by such an action, the ability to contribute willingly or unwillingly to rapprochement between Russia and NATO, would only be positive. Poland started the process and Lithuania should continue it.

The accession of the three Baltic States to the European Union is of equal benefit to Russia. Russian politicians only waste their time planning "obstacles" for the Baits or, for example, refusing to complete the border treaties. This resembles the policy of the past, with its priorities of dominance and confrontation, rather than cooperation. It is harmful to Russia itself. Therefore, Russia's friends should warn it on every occasion, especially when raising the issues of the Western reintegration of the Baltic States (that the East opposes) or the continued bloodshed in the Caucasus for the sake of yesterday's conquests.

I am a friend of a democratic Russia. Therefore, I speak about it openly, as I did a decade ago.

The real problem for Russia does not lie in the West, however. I repeat, that country wastes its time doing diplomatic and economic battle for the Baltic States as its zone of influence and maintains unnecessary tensions.

We take part in joint work in Europe. Its long-term agenda also includes Russia's European cultural integration. Undoubtedly, political culture should also be included. And so should a way of progress be, whereas the alternative, which we will have to overcome, is Russia's effort not to forget the "junior achievement" by Molotov and stop our legal and economic Euro-integration. The interests, priorities and visions of the future of the East and the West are still different. Such is the reality, and there should be no fear in defining it as it is. Only in this way can both visions become less different.

Some time ago, we thought that—after the generation of Mikhail Gorbachev—one more generation in Russia's political elite would be enough for democratic changes to be irrevocable in the largest territory of the world. Now we see that it will take a longer period of time.

The time is approaching for the new millennium, which promises no immediate changes, but promises of hard work indeed. Lithuania will work on her future and that of the whole of Europe. We will go on insisting that our national goals are not separate from the common goals of democracy as they are stated in the four-lateral US-Baltic charter signed by the four Presidents in 1998. We will insist on this basic idea, which I always keep for such political performances: indeed, Lithuania is the key to a larger Baltic area, but it would be wrong to see only an object there. Lithuania is a subject in history that a decade ago extended and consolidated an area of democracy on the eastern coast of our sea—the Northern Mediterranean— where the rule of law and a market economy were given preference.

Once again I would like to review the basic moral and pragmatic issues of our policy, both recent and future.

First of all, by her self-restoration a stable and independent Lithuania has crossed out the results of the criminal conspiracy and aggression of Hitler and Stalin in 1939-1940, thus bringing back historical justice and belief in it. It is important to

believe. International justice, if you like, is a way from the state of law towards something as yet only imagined as the World of Law. Thus, the peaceful liberation of Lithuania based on international law, the methods of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, was our contribution to that still-imagined future. We could give advice, mediate, assist in many conflicts that may occur in the post-Soviet era. We have the experience, which makes us experts, if anyone wishes to use it.

Last but not least, a secure, stable and prosperous Lithuania, as a democracy and free-market economy, will illustrate other principal advantages for our Eastern neighbors, consistently encouraging them to make the right choices. (It is already an ongoing process, of which I know from my contacts in 1999-2000 with colleagues from the Ukraine and Georgia.) Similarly, a stable and secure Lithuania will serve Poland well in our geopolitical South, Latvia in the North, and the Kaliningrad district and even Sweden in the West—to each of them in a different manner, and only positively. She can also serve to change the political mind of Russia.

Today, Russia is involved in a war: people are killed; masses of civilians left homeless; and this tragedy is not stopped despite formal Western demands. I remember one remark made to us, Lithuanians, by the West during Gorbachev's blockade of Lithuania: yes, he is wrong, but a big country has a big face... And this is a much bigger problem than when a small country loses face. You see, colleagues, sometimes the problem is in the size of face.

We make headway in all possible areas. As you know, all should change for the better in this best of all possible worlds. To contribute to this is not just naive idealism.

