

Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia at the Foreign Policy Debate in the Saeima, 27 January 2011

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I INTRODUCTION

Esteemed members of the Saeima, Mr President, Mr Prime Minister, esteemed colleagues – members of the Government, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen!

We live in an age whose dynamism is determined by global processes and which is rich in challenges. Today's world is complex not only in terms of geographical issues, but also due to a multiplicity of political dimensions. Risks and threats as much characterise the early 21st century as do democracy, freedom, and the rule of law. Advances in knowledge, technology and capacity, efficiency and competitiveness determine the level of ambition of any country, of individuals as well as the possibility for realizing these ambitions: as often as not this takes place outside one's own country. It is greatly to Latvia's benefit to have allies that share our values, and also that there exist international coalitions and associations. However in the latter particular interests are in evidence side-by-side with idealism, with occasionally preference given to convenience and toleration of double-standards. This has to be borne in mind at all times and everywhere, wherever our people, our government officials and diplomats strive to advance the national interests of the Republic of Latvia.

As regards national interests. The challenge of defending and advancing national interests is well understood by the foreign affairs sector, as these are present in all aspects of implementing foreign policy, in all countries and at all times. Thus, why today as the foreign policy is starting to be debated in the Saeima, I have chosen a citation, to inspire and to guide these debates, consistent with the anniversary of the de jure recognition of the Republic of Latvia, and furthermore, one that is slightly romantic, notably "*We must explore every avenue to bring about and to foster the well-being of Latvia!*" This idea was expressed by Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics, a statesman, a Latvian patriot and an outstanding diplomat, who, present at the very dawn of our independent statehood, during his life and in every professional activity was dedicated, above all, to advancing the national interests of Latvia.

At that time foreign policy was imbued with special importance. Later, it was foreign political foresight that helped sustain de jure recognition that our statehood continued to exist throughout the period of Soviet occupation.

Therefore, I can confidently assert that during the 20 years following restoration of statehood, Latvia's foreign policy has been successful. Our national security and opportunities for international action have never been as sound and comprehensive. Remarkable political goals have been reached. Presently we are endowed with a professional foreign service comprising 44 diplomatic and consular missions and representations abroad. Latvia is a member state of the United Nations, and of the European Union; our external security is guaranteed by the collective security system of the North Atlantic Alliance. These achievements have come about as a result of sustained and determined efforts, seeking out allies and relying upon their support, and consolidating Western values and democratic principles in the life of the state and society.

Nevertheless, these achievements must be sustained and steadily improved upon, focussing on seeking out new opportunities!

In working towards reaching these goals, there are enough opportunities for everyone to participate, taking on tasks and carrying out duties. All public institutions must contribute to promoting the name of Latvia in the world; this can be done by non-governmental organizations and even by individuals. It is vital that all actors in this process complement each other's activities, thus broadening the range of results that lead to reaching common goals. I firmly believe that foreign policy debate in the Saeima, as a new tradition launched today, will become a vital element in shaping a concerted foreign policy for Latvia, in securing continuity in foreign policy, as well as significantly promoting further growth and competitiveness of our country.

These are the goals set by the Government of Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis following the elections for 10th Saeima! I am grateful that, as Foreign Minister, and chairman of the Civic Union (*Pilsoniskā Savienība*) and of the Unity (*Vienotība*) union of parties, I shall have the opportunity to demonstrate continuity in foreign policy by implementing the foreign policy goals set out in

the Government Declaration. In international relations Latvia will respect and reinforce the interests and western values of Europe, will contribute to strengthening peace, security and sustainable development. We shall facilitate solidarity and mutual respect among nations, strengthen free trade, reduce poverty and protect human rights not only in our own country but also elsewhere in the world. Latvia has pledged to comply fully with international law and this commitment will remain in future the foundation for Latvia's foreign policy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We must be able not only to talk about abstract well-being, as Meierovics did in his time, but also to carry out practical duties as best we can, notably duties that comprise the daily work of Latvian Foreign Service personnel. And this is by no means an easy feat.

In particular, when shaping Latvia's foreign policy as regards time and extent, the outcome is influenced by limited means at our disposal vis-à-vis to impact processes that are determined by global, regional, or cultural and historical factors:

1. Currently, changes are taking place with respect to how political, financial, economic, and military issues influence global developments. In many cases, these changes have only indirectly impacted us. But for how long will this be so?! ...
2. The availability of resources, an educated workforce, and a business-friendly and innovative environment are fundamental factors in the intense struggle for competitive advantage.
3. The interests of Latvian entrepreneurs are increasingly related to non-traditional markets.
4. A growing number of residents of Latvia have taken direct contact with countries near and far, and are leaving Latvia.

Latvia's foreign policy was successful at a time when internal changes in our country successful. Thus, for instance, in an effort to overcome the economic crisis, the government chose a path based on co-operation with the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission. This choice can be variously evaluated, but based on a show of determination by Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis, we have earned the reputation of being a country which overcomes difficulties, and is able to implement the necessary reforms. The international community has developed a new trust in our country; the international community has appreciated Latvia's determination in taking difficult decisions. This has enhanced the self confidence of our foreign service; the world takes us seriously, listens to us, and we are able to attract resources that are sorely needed for development of the state of Latvia.

II GLOBAL DYNAMICS

Several weeks ago, acting in my capacity as Foreign Minister, I received an agitated telephone call from the manager of a Latvian tourist company who asked for assistance to our tourists stranded in Patagonia. They had become hostage to a political disagreement between the Chilean government and the people of that country. On the very same day, a minister from a certain country complained that he had been disappointed with the quality of the famous Latvian sprats. During the same week, the Foreign Ministry was subjected to unjustified criticism for the successful handling of the hostage crisis in Sudan. These examples graphically demonstrate that events taking place thousands of kilometres away, at any moment may become the source of pride or disappointment for a private individual, a businessman, or a politician in Latvia.

The principal mission of the foreign policy of Latvia is adapting global possibilities anywhere in the world to the needs of the citizens of this country; providing support to the residents of this country, representation of national interests, and issuing warnings of possible risks.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The world will never be like we used to know it before. However, we have not yet experienced either a standstill of the wheel of history, nor a complete renunciation by European countries of their national interests. On the contrary. We are witnesses to the creation of a new world order – of a multi-polar world. This world has seen a global economic crisis that has not had the same

impact on all countries. Therefore, countermeasures and specific remedial actions differ. New global economic structures, for instance, the G20 countries, have become increasingly more visible in determining development trends. Avenues are being explored of securing fair competition under free market conditions, or among companies established within state capitalism. The capability of the Western world for exporting democracy across the globe is shrinking.

The threat of large scale classical military conflicts does not exist; however, the number of regional conflicts and humanitarian disasters is on the rise, and their potential for negative consequences is increasing. A broad capacity of crisis management and also a broad scale co-operation is required in order to reduce asymmetrical threats in the 21st century. The Latvia foreign affairs service takes an active part in shaping such instruments, also ensuring the Northern Distribution Route through the Riga harbour for delivery of NATO cargoes to Afghanistan. When seeking countermeasures to threats, the adoption of the new NATO Strategic Concept at the Lisbon Summit should be highlighted: this has led to renewed trust in collective security and in Article 5 of the Treaty of Washington, which is the principal guarantee of Latvia's external security.

In the context of strategic security, the importance of the so-called 'reset' policy in US-Russia relations should be particularly emphasised. This policy has increased the security of countries in the Euro-Atlantic space. I am satisfied that during the Lisbon Summit I was among those few foreign ministers who urged the US Congress to ratify the US-Russia Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, START II. This initiative played a major role in the process of ratifying this the Treaty by the United States. I am convinced that Latvia has derived obvious benefits from the improvement in the climate of relations between the West and Russia, and is interested in elaboration of this policy.

New opportunities have arisen now that the European Union functions on a legal basis amended by the Lisbon Treaty: European foreign policy has acquired a new potent tool – the European External Action Service. The EU has gained a more focused outlook on international politics and has been able to formulate a common foreign policy both in relations with strategic partners and on global co-operation issues.

III THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF LATVIA IN 2010.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Disregarding the fact that in the course of recent years, the Foreign Ministry has operated under conditions of considerably reduced human, material, and financial resources, I believe that the state interests abroad are being successfully addressed. Latvia has consistently made use of the opportunities opened up by the Lisbon Treaty and foreign policy co-ordination in an EU framework. The fact that last year the Embassy of Latvia in Tashkent, at the request from the EU Presidency, acted as a local EU presidency in Uzbekistan, testifies to respect for our country. We have successfully represented the common NATO policy in Georgia. This year, this responsibility has been entrusted to Latvia in Uzbekistan.

It is worth mentioning that in 2010 Latvia successfully chaired the Baltic Council of Ministers and co-ordinated Baltic-Nordic co-operation. On Latvia's initiative, a joint report was drafted and approved providing recommendations to the Baltic and Nordic governments for enhancing co-operation in the region. A Latvia-Estonia Future Co-operation Report was produced and approved that included specific recommendations on how both neighbouring countries could be brought closer together. Agreement has been reached, and drafting of a similar Future Co-operation Report with Lithuania has begun.

I would like to emphasise that the Foreign Ministry actively participates in the preparation of visits by senior state officials and in these missions. I would like to highlight, in particular, the successful visit of the President of Latvia to Russia, the visits to Latvia by the Chancellor of Germany and the President of Poland.

This has developed confidence in a successful foreign policy of Latvia also for the year 2011.

IV FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES AND TASKS

What are the priorities of Latvia's foreign policy?

FIRST: Sustaining the image of Latvia as a trustworthy partner for co-operation in the European Union and in the Euro-Atlantic

space.

SECOND: Enhancement of a system for support to the external economic operations of entrepreneurs that would meet the needs of modern-day Latvia.

THIRD: Provide quality support to Latvian nationals throughout the world.

When looking at the first priority, we must speak about the need to strengthen the Collective Security system.

Following the Lisbon Summit, NATO as a military alliance will retain its central position in the security of our country. In view of this, the duty of Latvia is to contribute to infusing the new strategic concept of NATO with specific elements.

Additionally, in future Latvia will confirm that is not only a passive beneficiary of international collective security arrangements. This concerns a foreseeable and responsible participation of Latvia's military in the UN-supported mission [1] of NATO forces in Afghanistan (ISAF). The consolidation of Latvia's budget for 2011 must not jeopardise Latvia's participation in the ISAF mission. Only when we ourselves apply NATO *modus operandi* principle on the ground in Afghanistan, we have a moral right to expect that NATO aircraft will take stand guard on the inviolability of Latvia's airspace, that we would receive a decisive NATO support in case of a crisis, a threat.

Frequent calls, based on a short-sighted view of foreign-political interests, have been heard to cut funding and to withdraw Latvian soldiers from Afghanistan. I can assert that such actions would considerably damage not just the international prestige of our country.

There is no doubt that this year an assessment has to be made of Latvia's participation in the mission to Afghanistan. In my opinion, this review will substantiate a gradual shift of emphasis on engagement by the military to civilian assistance within joint projects in Afghanistan.

At the same time, I would like to emphasise the need for closer co-operation between NATO and the EU. Latvia is interested in securing a conventional weapons balance in Europe. To this end, Latvia's continued participation is required in negotiations on the further development of conventional arms control in Europe.

Latvia in the context of the foreign policy of the European Union

More than a year has passed since the Lisbon Treaty entered into effect. During this time, the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton has been carrying out her duties. During foreign ministers' discussions in Brussels, we have spent long hours debating the strategic role of the European Union on the global stage. Each of us is aware that Europe will be an influential global player only if we are able to speak with one voice.

Our contribution to the formation of a common position comprises expertise and knowledge we can offer about countries involved in the Eastern Partnership, i.e. Russia, and Central Asian countries. By strengthening our analytical capacity and embassies in the region's countries we shall become significant players in European Union scale discussions.

At the European Union level we have acquired a new instrument which still has an unexplored potential – the European External Action Service. For relatively small diplomatic services, which, in terms of numbers, definitely is the case of the Latvia diplomatic service, this is both an opportunity and a challenge! It is an opportunity to send diplomats to work for a strong international institution. It is a challenge – to grant extended leaves of absence to our best diplomats

Of course, support to our diplomats in applying for positions at the European External Action Service is, and will remain a priority of our work also in 2011.

Development co-operation policy.

Unfortunately, development co-operation policy has been undeservedly neglected and relies, for the most part, on initiatives of

non-governmental organisations in the implementation of specific projects. We must be aware that development co-operation policy is a vital foreign policy instrument. Being fully aware of the economic and financial situation in the country, I hope that, when adopting the law on next year's budget, we shall be able to take a long-term perspective.

Preparation for Latvia's Presidency of the European Union in 2015

Time and again, statements appear that no major challenges remain after accession to the European Union and NATO. I cannot but disagree. Presidency of the European Union is simultaneously an opportunity and a responsibility. For six months, Latvia will be responsible for successful functioning of the European Union; this will be our opportunity to facilitate resolution of certain issues in the common interest of Europe, to raise the profile of Latvia not only on the European, but also on a much wider scale. The Foreign Ministry has produced, and is preparing for submission to the Cabinet of Ministers an operational plan with specific actions to be taken during 2011 and in the following years. As early as this year, the process of training experts has to be elaborated in detail, the best funding model needs to be found for providing the required information technology infrastructure, and Latvia's priorities for the presidency period must be discussed. In order to have a both a qualitative and quantitative impact on processes in the European Union, we shall have to rely upon the entire intellectual potential of our public administration, the academic environment, the Parliament, the non-governmental sector. A secretariat for preparation of the Latvian Presidency is to be launched this year in September, and will take over the management of this process.

The participation of Latvia in European Union policy- and decision-making

Highly esteemed members of the Saeima,

For a number of years now, the European Union issues have ceased to be foreign policy matters and have turned into a logical part of domestic policy and are its continuation. The Foreign Ministry has been entrusted with a co-ordination function.

Our successful participation in shaping European Union policies depends on a number of factors:

- A precise and timely vision on the development of sectoral policies in Latvia;
- An ability to see Latvia's place and interests in a European perspective;
- Close co-operation among experts, sectoral associations, ministers, deputies, MEPs.

In Europe 2001 discussion in 2010 was largely devoted on how to handle the after-effects of the global financial and economic crisis, what measures should be taken in order to prevent their future reoccurrence. Not only that! As the result of a very precise and concerted action of all the involved institutions, Latvian diplomats and the Prime Minister's Office, the Council decided in May 2010 to deploy the office of the Body of *European Regulators for Electronic Communications* (BEREC Office) in Riga. This is the first EU level institution in Latvia.

In 2011, work will continue on the implementation of the European Semester, the development of the National Reform Programmes for implementation of the EU 2020 Strategy; agreements will have to be achieved concerning amendments to the Lisbon Treaty in order to establish a legal basis for the European Stability Mechanism.

I would like to direct your particular attention to the launching of negotiations in July on the Financial Framework for 2014-2020.

Already now, active discussions are taking place about changes in EU policies of importance to Latvia, such as the Cohesion Policy, the Common Agricultural Policy, transport, energy.

I would like to invite the line ministries, Saeima deputies and the competent committees alike to persist in their efforts to explain the needs, opinions, and interests of Latvia both to Commission services and to colleagues in other European Union Member States, and in the European Parliament.

The market of Latvia is small, with a limited scope for economic activities; trust has been lost during the economic crisis, and also budget consolidation measures have made attracting foreign investors difficult. Given the fact that the Foreign Service of Latvia has 44 diplomatic missions at its disposal, I believe that it is important for Latvian business people and for the organisations which represent them to be able to take a full advantage of the opportunities offered by the Foreign Service. This is a unique "support network of the business interests of Latvia", of which there is no equal either inside or outside of Latvia. Focused use should be made of this network when promoting Latvia's external economic activities, in developing contacts and in marketing. This undeniably is one of my priorities and is reflected in our Government Declaration.

As the result, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Economy, as well as the Latvian Investment and Development Agency (LIAA) and business associations need to overcome prejudices, seek unexplored opportunities, consolidate their efforts and co-operation, and expand their scope of vision. Entrepreneurs' associations have to be engaged in a trilateral co-operation mechanism involving the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of the Economy and the LIAA. This would allow better assessing the interests of our business people in new markets.

Towards this end, and in association with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Latvia, an 'Investment portfolio' is being compiled with a selection of a clear offer targeted at a specific market, or of investment projects. Other sectoral associations must also be engaged in a similar manner. Such an approach will provide an important justification for expanding in future our network of embassies.

VI REGIONAL CO-OPERATION INITIATIVES AND RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

Ladies and gentlemen,

Notwithstanding the ever-increasing extent of Latvia's interests, competence and activities in distant regions throughout the world, activities the policies of our country in our immediate neighbourhood, both within the EU and on a bilateral basis, will remain in future to be particularly important. Thus, in addition to elaboration of the EU Baltic Sea Region Strategy, we consider as equally significant the EU Eastern Partnership policy which facilitates co-operation with Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and Belarus. I intend to visit all of these countries, except Belarus, in advance of the EU Budapest Summit in May of this year, in order better to understand their needs as well as the opportunities for Latvia to co-operate with these countries in the context of EU values and market economic issues. Co-operation with these, as well as with Central Asian countries is of particular importance in the framework of EU Development Policy.

However, at the same time Latvia is, and will remain to be an active partner co-operating with the Nordic and other Baltic countries. This co-operation is an expression of our identity and relates to our economic growth and long-term security. It is in the interests of Latvia to strengthen co-operation in this, our immediate neighbourhood. This is particularly important since the present extent of integration of the Nordic and Baltic countries is an unprecedented phenomenon in our history and there is a need to develop co-operation projects that will bring us together even closer. In this respect, the foreign policy of the restored Republic of Latvia has been much more successful than that implemented during the time of Z. Meierovics, when the Republic faced insurmountable barriers to developing close ties among the Baltic States.

Consequently, we must dispense with the pre-election rhetoric expressed by a number of Latvian politicians about "the Latvian financial occupation", unsound investment policies of Scandinavian banks, as well as desist from unjustified criticism of my distinguished Swedish colleague, Karl Bildt. It is important to intensify regional co-operation, to exploit the possibilities offered by the free market and actively to profit from these activities. Estonia, our neighbor, has joined the euro zone and has set us a good example in this respect.

The advantages of the common market should be used effectively and regional administrative barriers should be eliminated. The report of last year on how NB8 cooperation has improved contains 16 specific near-term recommendations. The recent joint announcement on the post-election situation in Belarus made by myself and the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lene Espersen, represents implementation of these recommendations.

One typical difficulty experienced within the co-operation framework of both the NB8 and the Baltic States is the occasional

inability to see beyond narrow national short-term interests so as to perceive common long-term benefits. The field of energy policy clearly demonstrates these difficulties. In this regard, an agreement on common regional interests within the EU appears to be in place; however, due to obstacles that are more or less visible, development of joint projects has been unforgivably slow. Were greater solidarity be reached among our neighbouring states it would definitely yield a positive impact upon each state separately, and on the overall regional economic situation in the Baltic Sea region.

I shall address for completeness the importance of Latvia's long-standing and close relationship with Germany and Poland, the great states of our region. I am gratified to be able to say that today our relationship with these states has attained a new quality. The visits by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Polish President Komarowsky to Latvia last autumn bear witness to this. Our attention on future co-operation with these states will be focussed on strengthening economic ties between them and Latvia. Regular consultations at the highest political level, and also at expert level, will be of utmost importance when harmonising with these significant partners Latvia's standpoint on critical issues placed on the agenda of the EU and that of other international organizations.

USA:

Engagement with the USA thus far has had a vital impact upon regional stability and on its strategic development. The foreign policy of Latvia will be directed towards raising the visibility of links with the USA with the Baltic Sea region, and with Latvia not only in relation to traditional security issues, but also in such fields as education, the economy and culture. Therefore, one of the important tasks for Latvia in the field of education is to make use of possibilities opened up last year by the initiative of the USA Baltic Independence Foundation. This initiative provides the possibility for our students to study in the best USA universities on the condition of returning home to Latvia after graduation. We are also interested in the USA presence when developing the energy sector in the Baltic region. Thus, we shall strive to establish tangible co-operation in the field of energy.

The neighbouring countries Russia and Belarus, their political and economic processes are very important to Latvia in the context of the aforementioned relationship.

Russia

Active diplomatic efforts over the past year have resulted in signature of several bilateral framework documents with Russia; additional cooperation between our countries is expected. Positive results were achieved due to developments in the strategic environment of the relationship between the West and Russia; additionally, through successful implementation by Latvia of a consistent foreign policy. Our greatest success in the evolving relationship with our neighbouring state has been the official visit of our State President in Russia.

The Treaty on avoiding double taxation and other Agreements recently signed, as well as their implementation in future open up new opportunities for businesses development and co-operation in a number of areas. It is essential to note that the visit of State President Valdis Zatlers has changed the atmosphere of the Latvian-Russian relationship. It has also opened up possibilities for dialogue on historical issues related to the recent totalitarian period. Improved access to Russian archives shall serve as an indicator of the degree of openness on the part of Russia. Latvia will search possibilities for its participation in the EU-Russia Partnership Modernisation programme, with a view to referring modernisation to all spheres of public life, not merely the transfer of Western technology. Cooperation between EU and Russia based on a legally binding cooperation agreement is necessary that these aims be achieved. It is in Latvia's best interests to see Russia join the World Trade Organization.

Belarus

Regrettably, the Presidential election in Belarus held in December last year, and the related violence directed at political opponents has had a significant detrimental effect on the political relationship between Belarus and democratic countries. As a result EU is assessing and reviewing its "critical dialogue" policies towards Belarus. The position of Latvia has been clear and unequivocal from the outset: all political prisoners should be released immediately. Latvia will support the EU collective decision on Belarus, facilitate simplification of travel arrangements for ordinary citizens and students from Belarus to come to the EU, and lend its support for strengthening democracy and civil society.

I would like to emphasize that it is in Latvia's best interests to promote the relationship between Belarus and EU, including exploitation of opportunities afforded by the EU Eastern Partnership. The EU policy towards Belarus might be from end of January notwithstanding, it is in our best interests to avoid acting against the interests of the ordinary people of Belarus. Therefore, we shall continue to implement a project, initiated together with the USA, on creating a modern business school in Minsk.

VII QUALITY SERVICES FOR LATVIAN NATIONALS AND THE LATVIAN COMMUNITY ABROAD

As I mentioned previously, a large number of Latvian citizens regularly travel abroad and encounter there a diverse range of situations. A growing number of people are leaving Latvia opting for temporary or long-term residence abroad. Unfortunately over the previous year the Consular Service has encountered serious capacity-related difficulties in issuing visas in a timely fashion to all the people who wished to visit Latvia. At the same time there has been a noteworthy initiative has been implemented, a mobile passport issuing system, which has made it possible to issue passports to Latvian citizens residing outside of Latvia, facilitating their participation in the elections of the 10th Saeima. This initiative will be further supported in future.

In view of the significant number of people of Latvian origin residing abroad, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has committed itself to improving co-operation with compatriots in their countries of abode. I have recently signed a co-operation agreement between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the World Federation of Free Latvians. In addition, it is intended to develop co-operative projects in the fields of economics, education and culture, in order that Latvia acquire useful knowledge by attracting the intellectual resources and experience of Latvians living abroad.

VIII THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE TO THE WORK OF THE FOREIGN SERVICE

Esteemed members of the Saeima,

The validity of the policy paper "Foreign Policy Guidelines of the Republic of Latvia for 2006-2010" expired at the end of last year. These guidelines had been drawn up for the period immediately following Latvian accession to the European Union and NATO. At present, it is clear that foreign policy requires a more frequent assessment, as documents tend to be static and, therefore, cannot fully reflect all of the current issues that have to be dealt with by a foreign policy in a changing international environment.

It would be more appropriate to meet this challenge through a more regular exchange of opinions between the author and the implementer of foreign policy, between the Saeima and the Government. Such sharing of opinions could lead to a more firm conviction that the foreign policy of our state has been jointly agreed. Being aware of this, the Government, quite some time before the conclusion of its initial period of 100 days in office, agreed to launch this first consultation with the Saeima, and, furthermore, undertakes to hold an annual foreign policy debate here. The evaluation and recommendations that we await from the members of parliament today will be a valuable contribution to the work of the Foreign Service of the Republic of Latvia.

I appreciate this opportunity to address you and I anticipate your contribution to better my work in the interests of the Republic of Latvia.

Girts Valdis Kristovskis

Foreign Minister

[1] UN Security Council's Resolutions No.1386/2001 and No.1510/2003)