

Dear Valdis Zatlers, President of the Republic of Latvia and dear friend!  
Dear people of Estonia and Latvia!

The date of 21 December 2007 – or rather, last midnight – should check the talk about new and old Europe. Abolition of border controls on still more internal borders of the European Union is a definite proof that there only is one Europe.

A Europe where nations and peoples trust each other. The nations and peoples who have faithful partners and allies in each other.

It is trust and alliance that has brought us today to the border between Estonia and Latvia, and spiritually also to several other internal borders of the European Union. Barriers are removed, checkpoints closed and the closed border roads re-opened – all this is part of the history of mutual trust in Europe.

It is therefore symbolic that we stand today at the meeting point of Raja Street of the Estonian town Valga and Riga Street of the Latvian Valka. *Rada* (a path in Estonian) is a good and simple word, meaning much more than an asphalt-covered street. It means progress, and a connecting path. For instance between Valga and Riga and between Valka and Tallinn.

Behind the expansion of the Schengen zone, we can see the commitment of many good people, especially officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as border guards and policemen; this, as well as their modern equipment, and undoubtedly the help and support of the European Union, has been the precondition of the Schengen expansion.

Although there is no more routine border control between us, I assure you that there shall be no security gaps. Let the ever-tightening co-operation between Estonian and Latvian police, as well as international partnership, be a guarantee of that.

Joining the Schengen visa space is an opportunity, a challenge and certainly a responsibility for all of us.

Abolishing overt border control does not abolish borders or countries. Valga shall be Valga and Valka shall be Valka, Estonia shall be Estonia and Latvia shall be Latvia. There will be more space, more openness.

Dear people in South Estonia and North Latvia – make use of the opportunities this new openness offers. Mari and Juhan, Inta and Valdis – go visit each other, look at all the good things your neighbours are doing. Border municipalities should have close relations, and why not start with a joint celebration of Iigo, or Midsummer.

I wish our local governments, our tourist firms and entrepreneurs a sharp eye for the new opportunities that joining the Schengen visa zone will bring to Estonia and Latvia, and the courage to make use of them.

The barriers have fallen. The path is free. Now, the path starting in Lapland will take us without any interruptions – also through Valga and Valka – to the southernmost point of Portugal. All this is our Europe.

Thank you!