

Mr. President,
Mrs. Adamkiene,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to say, once again: Welcome to Estonia! – Sveiki atvyke I Estija!

At the end of last year a collection of articles relating to the collective memory of the Baltic nations was published. This English-language volume, consisting of articles by Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian scholars, dealing with literature, folklore, and theatre, is titled “We Have Something In Common: **The Baltic Memory**”. I don’t think that this is a bad title. But, as we all very well know, nations, be they large or small, do not live off memories alone.

Indeed, today, our nations share far more than historical memories. We, of course, have common historical experiences, but now we are both members of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation – two international organisations based upon common values. We can note with satisfaction that today’s meetings between our delegations confirmed that our positions concerning all essential international and regional issues as well as bilateral relations are actually identical. And I would like to state in all sincerity that both Lithuanians and Estonians regard our accession to the Schengen space as being the most significant political event of the year 2007.

If we look back at the history of our nations we can note many common traits, but also, many differences. As recently as in the late Middle Ages and the early Modern Period the course of our nations was quite different. But the closer we come to the present era the more we find what we have in common. The national awakening of both our nations in the 19th century occurred at about the same time. And what we today refer to as our professional national cultures – theatre, poetry, composition of serious music, became really established in the last decade of the very same 19th century.

At this point, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the first outstanding Estonian professional composer and musician, Rudolf Tobias, who, by today’s standards, can be regarded as the founder of modern Estonian musical culture, was born in 1873. While the unique Lithuanian musical genius, Mikalojus Čiurlionis, whose significance in Lithuanian culture is comparable to Rudolf Tobias’s position in Estonia’s musical culture, was born just two years later, in 1875. This can, of course, be regarded as a coincidence but, at the same time, it wasn’t. After all, it was the last decade of the 19th century that saw the true vitalisation of the processes that eventually led to the establishment of freedom and independence of our nations. And, incidentally, thanks to the course of history as well as our own will the national independence days of our nations – the 16th and 24th of February, 1918 – are only eight days apart.

Therefore I would like to recall of what Enn Sarv, an Estonian freedom fighter who passed away just a month ago, has said. Namely that Estonian and Lithuanian freedom fighters already cooperated with each other to regain independence of their homelands during the World War II Nazi occupation. This cooperation continued naturally between the Lithuanian and Estonian

dissidents and freedom fighters and developed further during the decades of the second Soviet occupation. We have never fought against anyone but rather have fought for our freedom and principles. Personally, I hold in high esteem the political efforts of Lithuanians in the course of the long years of exile. Considering the size of the Lithuanian émigré community the Lithuanians had greater opportunities for influencing the policies of their adopted homelands vis-à-vis the three Baltic states. I refer especially to the great contribution that has been made, over the years, by the Lithuanian community, including you, President Adamkus, to the promotion of Baltic interests in the United States.

Now we can promote Baltic interests not in exile but within the European Union and NATO. Today, like at the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s of the previous century, we are united by major common goals. Then, our aim was to re-establish democracy and rule of law in our countries and to ensure the free development of our cultures. And now that we have achieved these objectives and have become members of both the European Union and NATO we can aver that our nations are better off than ever before.

Thanks to our improved welfare during the last decade our bilateral relations in all spheres have developed at a rapidly. Our business relations have increased in the form of mutual investments as have also bilateral relations at the grass-roots level. I know that ever more Estonians are visiting your beautiful country.

What we need today, is to deepen these relations, from everyday exchanges at the level of tourists visiting each others countries all the way up to strategic planning in our approaches to issues in the European Union and NATO. Be it working on how to ensure that Europe's history is the history of all of Europe, not the history of part of Europe, with our pasts shrugged off or whitewashed. Or developing genuine energy security in this corner of the European Union. Or ensuring that neighbors like Ukraine and Georgia are not bartered away in deals over our heads, or indeed that future is not bartered over our heads. We are only beginning to fathom how great the need for co-operation is. It's time we start in earnest.

Mr. President,
Mrs. Adamkiene,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentleman,

Permit to raise a glass to Lithuanian and Estonian friendship, as well as to the success of both nations!

Thank you! – Dekoju!