



CENTER FOR TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

Remarks by H.E. Antanas VALIONIS, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Lithuania
at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies
on January 22, 2004

*"Securing Societies and States: The Baltic Region After EU and NATO
Enlargement"*

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address this distinguished audience here at SAIS, which October last year saw the official launching of the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe, or e-PINE.

I'm also pleased to have Daniel Hamilton, a "parent" of US-Baltic Charter, next to myself. With your support, I am convinced, e-PINE is in the right hands.

The goals of the Charter have been completed. We are grateful for the active support of US President, US Congress and Administration on our way to EU and NATO membership.

President Bush's phrase "**Anyone who would choose Lithuania as an enemy has also made an enemy of the United States of America**" will remain engrained in our hearts and minds.

After Prague, the United States could have easily shifted its focus in other directions, to deal with more urgent matters and global threats.

Yet e-PINE demonstrates that US commitment to the Baltic region remains steady and lasting, not subject to specific agendas and timetables.

Your commitment is our inspiration. Reinforcing the Baltic success story, EU and NATO membership will encourage us to emulate our democratic experience. We shall work to make sure that the seeds of democracy take firm root east of us. We shall offer our help to countries which seek to embrace the values of democracy and freedom to pursue their internal reforms, by encouraging their integration towards Western institutions.

We owe it to our allies to do our best in this endeavour – and to the United States in particular.

How can we best contribute to making this part of Europe more secure, more stable, more democratic? Here's what Lithuania can do.

On the domestic side, we shall continue to reform national armed forces in accordance with NATO standards and shifting operational and technical requirements; To consistently implement the commitment to allocate two per cent of GDP for defence needs; To fight corruption, organized crime, and all sorts of trafficking as well as to strengthen export control of strategic goods and technologies.

We will also continue our work on the complex and delicate issues related to the Holocaust, including property restitution. Not because somebody is urging us to do so- but because coming to terms fully and honestly with the past is a natural condition for our strength and maturity as a nation.

Looking outward, Lithuania can best contribute to broader security by continuing to assume a role of leadership in regional cooperation, by sharing the experience of building democracy and free market economy with countries who remain outside EU and NATO enlargement area.

We are too small to change the world. But we can and will do our best in the region that we know best: our eastern neighbours.

Our work will include projects aimed at reducing development gap further east, which has become increasingly visible in the context of European integration.

We shall continue assisting the development of Kaliningrad Region; supporting Ukraine's European vocation; and sharing our transformation experience with the nations of South Caucasus, Georgia in particular.

Even in the difficult case of Belarus we believe that dialogue is more promising than isolation. December last year we held a round table for Belarusian parliamentarians to promote consolidation between various democratic forces in view of coming elections in Belarus. This round table produced a joint declaration of the largest Belarusian opposition parties, a step that will hopefully improve their electoral chances. Another recent project was bringing a large group of Belarusian school children to Lithuania for Belarusian language studies, since these are unavailable in Belarus itself.

We hope these and other projects that we have in the pipeline will help emerge in Belarus for a civil society which can and does make a difference. We have to win the minds of Belarusian population, in order to draw them to common ideals and values. Only so can we expect to help emerge a responsible civil society able and willing to choose the road of democracy.

Besides implementing bilateral projects, Lithuania is actively participating in broader initiatives such as EU Wider Europe/ New Neighbours Initiative, Nordic Dimension Initiative and other regional frameworks. These frameworks offer unique opportunities to bring individual countries' projects, policies and resources under a single and coherent long-term strategy aimed at promoting democracy and prosperity in the new neighbourhood of the EU and NATO, for the sake of completing the goal of a "Europe whole and free and at peace".

Meant to build on the synergy of such existing frameworks, e-PINE fits perfectly into existing mechanisms of regional cooperation. We have already submitted a variety of project proposals for e-PINE target countries to Washington and to our Baltic and Nordic neighbours.

To start the initiative going, we also propose to host this spring in Vilnius a first operational e-PINE event: an e-PINE Political Directors meeting, alongside with an Eight plus One format think- tank round table on regional issues.

We are eager to move on from the stage of discussions to that of practical implementation. The sooner there is proof that e-PINE is useful to those it is meant for, the better the chances for its attractiveness and overall effectiveness.

Russia, and northwestern Russia in particular could well benefit from e-PINE, with projects aimed at fighting corruption, human trafficking and organised crime, strengthening border controls, or combating HIV/AIDS.

Given Russia's strategic importance, Lithuania's interest is to maintain a mutually beneficial dialogue and cooperation at all levels. We hope that the positive experience of our bilateral cooperation with Russia will benefit both the EU and NATO.

On the other hand, we are convinced that our membership in these two organisations will create an even more positive climate for Lithuanian-Russian relations and for strengthening trust and confidence in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since the year 2000 Lithuania has been working to establish new patterns of cooperation among actual and potential NATO candidates. The creation of Vilnius-10 Group was a success story. As a founder of Vilnius-10, Lithuania will make sure the movement survives current enlargement and remains a useful tool for implementing NATO policies in a wide range of areas, including efforts to stabilize and democratize our immediate neighbourhood to the east and to complete the transformation process in the Balkans.

In the spirit of 'open door' policy, we will do our best to support Albania's, Croatia's and Macedonia's progress in adopting NATO standards.

This brings me to the issue of transatlantic cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Lithuania believes that only a strong Europe can assure the viability and credibility of the trans-Atlantic link which brought security and prosperity to the Continent in the first place.

However, in supporting a strong Europe, we only support EU's security and defence identity to the extent it complements and strengthens NATO. We therefore welcome the strategic partnership agreement Berlin- Plus reached in December 2002 between the EU and NATO.

To deal effectively with global security challenges, such as international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, illegal migration, poverty and the spread of highly dangerous diseases, Europe and the United States must stand united.

Because of the complexity and diversity of problems as well as potential threats arising to the entire Euroatlantic community, the area of Greater Middle East is one such area where constant and well coordinated efforts of both the EU and NATO as well as individual countries, first and foremost the United States will be needed for years to come.

By joining international peace operations in the Balkans ten years ago, and more recently, by joining US- led coalition in Afghanistan and Iraq, Lithuania demonstrated its readiness to take up the responsibilities of an ally.

Our history taught us to defend freedom. To understand that the loss of freedom in any one part of the world means a loss to us all. A recipient of security only a few years ago, we are proud today to be among providers of security and freedom.

And I can assure you: for the sake of our common ideals and values, Lithuania will stand by our allies where our presence is most needed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As President Kennedy said in his Paulskirche address as early as 1963, "It is only a fully cohesive Europe that can protect us all against fragmentation of the alliance. Only such a Europe will permit full reciprocity of treatment across the ocean, in facing the Atlantic agenda. With only such a Europe can we have a full give-and-take between equals, an equal sharing of responsibilities, and an equal level of sacrifice".

It is this kind of cohesive Europe, able and willing to share responsibilities and sacrifice, that Lithuania hopes to help build in order to maintain a strong, viable and effective trans-atlantic relationship.

Lithuania's best contribution to this strong relationship is our readiness to share experience that experience is most needed, to assume due burden and responsibility, and to project a spirit of leadership for a strong and prosperous region.

Thank you.