



COOPERTATIVA
CATTOLICO-DEMOCRATICA
DI CULTURA

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**I POPOLI DELL'EST CITTADINI DELL'EUROPA UNITA
(DALL'UNIONE SOVIETICA ALL'UNIONE EUROPEA)**

I would like to express my thanks to the Cultural Association of Brescia (CCDC - Cooperativa Cattolico-democratica di Cultura) for this opportunity to share with you my ideas on Europe, its past, present and future. The announced title of my lecture is "People from the East, Citizens of the United Europe". I think that this headline nicely reflects the contradictions and hopes which have existed in Europe since the fall of the Iron Curtain. There are concerns about whether the newly arrived people from the East – or, more precisely, from Eastern Europe – hold the same values and have the same civilisation as that of Western Europe. The title also embodies a yearning for the true unity which was denied to the continent for fifty years. Yes, we have all lived in a Europe that was split apart by the Iron Curtain, it's just that each of us lived on his or her own side of that curtain. That is why our experiences are so very different, and one of the most important tasks for each and every one of us is to do our utmost to overcome this estrangement. I am deeply convinced that only by speaking frankly and listening carefully to each other's differing stories we will be able to overcome the consequences of the Iron Curtain in European consciousness and create truly united Europe.

I will begin with two scenes from the past.

The first involves the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. For Europeans, this symbolised the end of the Cold War. I watched the process on a television news programme which originated in Moscow. Watching the happy Germans, I felt the bitter knowledge that for Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, World War II was not yet over. We were still apart from free and democratic Europe. We had not been the masters of our own destinies since the Soviet Union still occupied the Baltic States in 1940. For those three countries, World War II really ended only when the Soviet Union collapsed and we joined the European Union and NATO.

The second scene, which takes place 10 years later, in 1999. An experienced French ambassador who had worked in the Soviet Union on several occasions during his distinguished career, a diplomat who was familiar with the totalitarian Soviet regime and the behind-the-scenes battles of the Cold War. With charming frankness, he posed the following question to me: "Madam Ambassador, do you really think that it would be a good idea to admit the Baltic States to NATO? The Baltic States cannot be protected, and we Europeans want good relations with Russia." In his words, I heard the echoes of what British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain said: "Danzig is not worth the bones of a single British grenadier." It also reminded me of the dirty deal of Munich, when European statesmen sacrificed Czechoslovakia in the hope that lasting peace would be the result. It was not long before the allies died for Danzig in Northern Africa, Normandy and Italy, while the bargaining in Munich did not save the continent from war.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With great relief, we can note that the 20th century, with its social upheavals, bloody wars and inhuman challenges, is now irreversibly in the past. Two totalitarian regimes – Nazism and Communism. Revolutions. Two world wars which erased the lives of millions of people. What a terrible cost for Europeans to pay in return for the understanding that there must be economic and political co-operation which, for all eternity, excludes war as a means for resolving conflicts or misunderstandings among neighbours.



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Most of you belong to a generation in which war and even memory of war is a theoretical construct. For me, as for most Eastern Europeans and Balts, war is a part of my personal experience. For us, the war did not end in 1945. It continued until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the withdrawal of the Soviet Armed Forces from Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. The consequences of the world war were finally overcome and Europe once again was unified on May 1, 2004, when the flags of ten new member states of the European Union were raised outside that organisation's headquarters.

When I watched my country's flag fluttering in the wind outside the EU building, I felt both joy and sadness. I felt a sense of personal triumph at having overcome the historical and geopolitical determinations to which my country and my nation had fallen victim. And yet I also had to think about my grandparents, who senselessly lost their lives in the concentration camps of the Gulag. I had to think about my mother and father, who lost their health and their youth in Siberia. I was born in the Gulag into a captive world, and yet history had other plans for me. Forty years later it was my great privilege to serve as one of the leaders of Latvia's national revolution. We waged a battle on behalf of Latvia's independence which brought forward the collapse of the "evil empire" which was the Soviet Union. 15 years later as a Foreign Minister of Latvia I had the honour to pose my signature on the European Treaty of Latvia.

It is precisely this personal experience which turned me into a dedicated European, a woman who considers tolerance and respect for human rights to be principles of the highest order. I am convinced that the Baltic States and countries of the Eastern Europe have no choice but to be members of the European Union and NATO. So, too, I am convinced that under conditions of globalisation, the European Union has no choice but to follow the vision of Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet about the EU as an "ever closer union." I see the European Union as an alliance of nation states, one which brings together political and economic potential so as to expand its influence in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

Each person knows his or her own story best. That is why first of all I shall speak about the history of Latvia and of my family in order to emphasise how important it is for Western Europeans to be aware that without the reunification of European history, the true reunification of Europe will not be accomplished.

The destiny of Latvia, along with many other European countries and nations, was determined on August 23, 1939, when Nazi Germany and the Communist Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact and agreed on the division of Europe into two spheres of influence. Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were left under the control of the USSR.

Germany invaded Poland a few days later, (the USSR invaded eastern Poland 17 days later), and the Second World War was underway. At the end of the war, the victorious allies gathered at Yalta and bowed before Stalin's pressure. In the name of Western European security, they left Eastern Europe and the Baltic States under the control of the Soviet Union. Thus appeared the Iron Curtain, which split Europe and Europeans into two worlds – the free world, and the captive world.

During 50 years of the 20th century, Latvia lived through three consecutive occupations – the Soviet, the German, and then again the Soviet. This resulted in an enormous loss of human life. There has never been full documentation of the number of Latvians who suffered under both totalitarian regimes – those who were murdered, deported, imprisoned in death camps, killed in wars initiated by foreign powers, mobilised by the Soviet or Nazi armies, or forced into emigration. The best estimate is that this number exceeds 600 thousand lives, including unborn children. To this massive number we must add the 70 thousand Latvian Jews who were exterminated by the Nazis. The more facts we gather, the higher are the numbers.



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All of these must be universally known facts about European history, but European history books almost do not contain information about them. Europeans know almost nothing about how decisions by the major powers affected the lives of millions of innocent people for many decades to come. Let the destiny of my family serve as a powerful illustration of what happened in the Soviet-occupied Baltic States – not just to us, but to countless people.

My mother was fourteen years old when on the 14th of June, 1941, she, together with my grandfather and grandmother, and more than fifteen thousand other innocent persons, was deported to Siberia. My paternal grandmother and my father, along with 43 000 other innocents branded “enemies of the people”, were sent to Siberia on March 25, 1949.

For years our family had no idea of what happened to my two grandfathers. Before Gorbachev’s Perestroika in the late 1980s, it was taboo to talk about mass deportations. It was not until 1990 that the KGB officially informed my mother of her father’s death on December 31, 1941. After the end of World War II my paternal grandfather along with other Latvian partisans carried on the struggle as a guerrilla fighter. Soon he was arrested by the KGB and, after being tortured and subjected to a sham trial, was sent to the Gulag. My paternal grandfather died in the Gulag in 1953.

My maternal grandmother died in 1950 in deportation. She was malnourished and spent her last years doing work that was beyond her strength.

My parents met in Siberia and married there in 1951. I was born on December 22, 1952, in the Village of Togur, District of Kolpachevo, Region of Tomsk. Twice monthly my parents had to check in with the commandant’s office. Thus, I also was destined for captivity. My father and mother had no desire to provide the Soviets with more slaves, and so I was not to have any brothers or sisters.

After Stalin’s death, the deportees were allowed to return to Latvia. On May 20, 1957, we embarked for Latvia. My family’s Siberian odyssey was about to come to an end. My mother had endured 16 years of it; my father and grandmother eight years and three months; and I – four years and five months. My mother was a young girl of 14 when she was deported to Siberia and returned a woman of 30.

From that moment until now, I have never forgotten the expression in my mother’s eyes as the train we were on made its first stop in Latvia and we were again able to touch and smell Latvian soil.

It is because I understand my moral obligation vis-à-vis historical truth that I wrote the book “With Dance Shoes in Siberian Snows” which tells the sad story of my family sufferings in Siberia. It has attracted international interest and has been published in nine languages. In 2005 the publishing house *Libri Scheiwiller* published *Scarpette da ballo nelle nevi di Siberia* in Italian. I am deeply grateful to publisher and particularly to Mrs. Gaia Weiss who translated the book into Italian.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I remind you of these horrifying facts and tell you about my personal history because I am convinced that the world must learn about the crimes which were committed behind the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. During that time, the free Western nations were building up a democratic and prosperous Europe, governed by the rule of law and respect for human rights. Occupation and totalitarian domination – that is an abnormal situation. For decades, the consequences of precisely such a situation tormented people in many countries. Those who feel that they are “in the right” blame those who are seen as having been “in the wrong” for the misfortunes that were experienced and the crimes that were committed.



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The Nazi occupation of France lasted just five years, and very much the same was true in other countries of Western Europe. And yet there are still questions in those countries which have not been completely answered today. There are still individuals whose degree of collaboration is the subject of passionate debate.

Let me say again – Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania experienced three occupations, one after the other, with a combined duration of 50 years – far exceeding anything that the rest of Europe experienced in the 20th century. Questions about the compliance and collaboration of each individual with the various regimes are, therefore, particularly painful. Only since the restoration of our independence have we regained the freedom to judge our own history, to cleanse it of the lies and propaganda that were told by the foreign regimes. Both the Nazi and the Soviet regimes committed crimes in the Baltic States. Those who were guilty – irrespective of whether they worked on behalf of the Nazi or the Communist doctrine – must be brought to justice, and so must those of their local collaborators who committed crimes against the civilian population. Crimes against humanity have no statute of limitations.

Ladies and gentlemen.

The Iron Curtain not only split Europe into two parts, it also ensnared the passage of time. Captivity slowed down and delayed the natural development of Eastern European countries and their people. Time exploded after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Once slow, time now rushed forward with enormous speed. You can imagine that major decisions on political, economic and social reforms had to be taken very quickly, indeed. In the relatively short period of 15 years of freedom, the Eastern Europeans and the Balts have managed to catch up to the European train which left the platform long ago. For us, this required vision, political will and a national consensus to implement the unpopular economic, financial and social reforms that were needed in order to join other Europeans in the Union.

We must all understand, however, that eliminating the last mental scars of the Iron Curtain will require much more common effort and common good will. We must remember that the heavy burdens inherited from the past which Eastern Europe and the Baltic States had to bear are an integral component of public consciousness, an ongoing trauma which manifests itself in a wide variety of ways. This influences our views on international relations, our understanding of geopolitics. It determines our strategies for security policy and our economic decisions.

The views of Western Europe and Eastern Europe diverge most fundamentally when we talk about the history of the 20th century. Among all of the debts of the 20th century in Europe, there is one which stands out. The Iron Curtain excluded the captive nations from our common European home, but it also excluded 50 years of our true history from European history. The false historical version about our countries which was circulated until 1990 was entire censured. Facts were rewritten and slanted toward the political goals and ideology of the ruling Communist regimes. It was only after the fall of the Iron Curtain, when archives were opened for research and the memoirs of those who survived the repressions and the Gulag were published – only then did the truth begin to be known in the outside world. Documentary evidence and the appalling stories of the victims confirmed the criminal nature of the totalitarian Soviet regime.

For several generations now, people have been studying and documenting the crimes of Nazism, and still researchers are unveiling new facts and nuances which deepen our understanding of the inhuman nature of this machine of ideology and power. Today, all Europeans understand how important it is to be dedicated in the fight against any manifestation of racism, xenophobia, nationalism, religious intolerance and anti-Semitism; we know that these things must be nipped at the bud. At the same time, however, Europeans must gain an equal understanding of the crimes of the totalitarian Soviet regime, because these, too, are a part of our Continent's history. I am deeply convinced that it is the duty of my generation to write the complete and truthful history of the Iron Curtain. We must bring to light the crimes that were committed in Eastern



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Europe and the Baltic States. Otherwise Europe's history will remain incomplete, partial and dishonest. It will remain divided.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The mental barrier which was created between Western and Eastern Europe as the result of 50 years of our totalitarian domination still exists and must be overcome. There are hundreds and hundreds of signs to confirm that the appalling revelations and facts about the crimes of Soviet totalitarianism are familiar to most Western scholars, but have not penetrated Western consciousness. For far, far too many people, the crimes of Stalin do not inspire the same visceral reaction as the crimes of Hitler. We must all admit that much remains to be done in Europe to achieve equality of commemoration culture.

There is a set of circumstances which explains the absence of popular feeling about the tragedy of Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. Until fall of the Soviet regime, plausible information about the Gulag death camps and the scale of repression was scarce. Archives were not available for scholars and their research. The first eyewitness reports of the Gulag were often dismissed, because it was difficult to believe that the recited horrors could possibly be real.

It was with the feeling of long-awaited justice coming full circle that I listened to US President George Bush when he visited Rīga on May 5, 2005. This is what he said: "For much of Germany, defeat led to freedom. For much of Eastern and Central Europe, victory brought the iron rule of another empire. VE Day marked the end of fascism, but it did not end oppression. The agreement at Yalta followed in the unjust tradition of Munich and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Once again, when powerful governments negotiated, the freedom of small nations was somehow expendable. Yet this attempt to sacrifice freedom for the sake of stability left a continent divided and unstable. The captivity of millions in Central and Eastern Europe will be remembered as one of the greatest wrongs of history."

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am convinced that the framework of any policy which seeks to promote democratic awareness must include, as an integral component, the assessment and condemnation of all totalitarian regimes and their crimes. It is in this context that I believe that an international commission must be established to assess the crimes of the totalitarian Communist regime of the Soviet Union.

I also believe that the victims of Siberia, Budapest, Timisoara, Prague and Gdansk deserve a thorough investigation of the historical and legal aspects of Soviet totalitarianism. For this purpose, an international research institute must be established. Its summarised findings will provide information to the international community in support of the condemnation of the totalitarian Communist regime.

Ladies and gentlemen.

Please let me speak also to another dangerous trend which I see in discussions about the history of Europe in the 20th century. It appears that we are unable to eliminate the ideologies which underpin this debate, and the harsh political battles of the last century continue to affect our view of history in the 21st century. In March 2004, I was honoured to be asked to speak at the opening of the annual Leipzig Book Fair. I said that "the two totalitarian regimes – Nazism and Communism – were equally criminal," and this led to a storm of polemics. I was certainly misunderstood. Never for a moment was it my intention to suggest that Nazism was not a crime. It was a crime. Nazism will remain in human memory for all time as a synonym for the horrific crime which was the Holocaust. My aim was to focus the attention of Europeans on



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the fact that there was also a second criminal and totalitarian regime which condemned and incarcerated human beings not for what they did, but for who they were.

On January 25 of this year, Göran Lindblad, rapporteur for the Council of Europe's Political Affairs Committee, announced that a conservative estimate of the number of deaths that can be attributed to the Soviet and other Communist regimes between 1917 and the present day is ... 94.5 million. This includes 20 million victims in the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1989 – party purges, mass murders, deportations, starvation policies in the 1930s in Ukraine, as well as wartime reprisals. There were 65 million victims in China under Mao Zedong and his successors. One million in Vietnam, two million in North Korea, two million in Cambodia, one million in Eastern Europe, 150,000 in Latin America, 1.7 million in Africa, and 1.5 million in Afghanistan.

Compare this to the number of victims who fell prey to Nazi Germany and its allies. The military and civilian death toll from the mid-1930s until 1945 has been estimated at 56 million people, including six million Jews.

In saying that Nazism and Communism were equally criminal, I am not claiming that they were identical. Any student of Nazism and Communism will immediately observe two fundamental differences. In the Soviet system, the concept of “class enemy” was a far more malleable and widespread concept than was the concept of “Jew” in Nazi Germany. Hardly any Jew in Germany could change his or her status or, upon arriving at a death camp, has much of a chance of staying alive. Theirs was an insurmountable destiny. Those who found themselves in the Soviet Gulag, by contrast, could hope to survive, even as millions upon millions did not – that is the second big difference. Unlike the Nazi concentration camps, the Soviet Gulag was not aimed primarily at extermination of human beings. The *raison d'être* of the Gulag was economic in nature, and prisoners were utterly dehumanised and turned into manufacturing resources. The worth of their lives depended entirely on their ability to do their work. Even in death, these martyrs were not given back their name and surname. They had been converted from “units of labour” into a list of useless commodities. My grandfather, like many of those who died in the Gulag, was buried without a name, there was only a metal wire twisted around his neck or, perhaps, his foot, bearing his number as a prisoner.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have devoted much of my address to problems related to the heritage of totalitarianism in 20th-century history in Europe. You may ask why I am devoting so much attention to the past. Perhaps it would be better to forget about history and start with a blank page? My deepest belief is that the concept of the blank page is just an illusion which people use to escape from questions about their own responsibility for what has happened. To make a peace with own history – that is an individual process, but it is also something of a psychotherapeutic session for entire nations. It is painful to learn the truth, the truth can shake us to our core, but it is the only way to rise above the past in the name of the future. Germany has shown us how important this process is. Its *mea culpa* atoned for the sins of the Nazis and became the cornerstone for a new and democratic country and nation. Italy has undergone a similar process of reconciliation. South Africa underwent a painful process of purification when the apartheid collapsed. The South African Truth Commission became an instrument for national reconciliation. No country can refuse to make peace with its past if it is to become a normal country in which people are no longer tormented by the ghosts of the past and the temptations of authoritarianism.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Fifty years have passed since the signing of the Treaty of Rome. Yesterday the leaders of European Union member states gathered together to celebrate this anniversary and to adopt on the Berlin Declaration. The declaration evaluates the state of Europe and defines further directions for the EU's development. Berlin



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Declaration has an optimistic language. However, it seems to me that once again beautiful words are being used to replace the lack of clear political vision and political will to pursue that vision. Everything is fine when it comes to the Declarations in the European Union, but the EU does not do all that well in implementing their own declarations, strategies and decisions that have been taken. The Lisbon Strategy was one of the most important EU documents of the new millennium, its aim was to turn the EU into a global competitor. Basically, the strategy has failed.

We need only look at the Eurobarometer to find that the citizens of Europe are becoming more and more Eurosceptic, and that is despite all kinds of strategic documents on the communication and new political initiatives. Euroscepticism, moreover, is particularly on the rise in the founding countries of the EU. The French and Dutch rejection of the Constitutional Treaty showed increasing alienation between the EU's institutions and the citizens of Europe. It sometimes seems that those who are outside the EU have more positive attitude to what has been achieved by Europeans during 50 years of the European construction. Elsewhere in the world, European model of cooperation set an example of how countries can work together. As to the Europeans, it seems like they have lost faith in the European project.

Much of the responsibility for this must be undertaken by national governments which have not truly explained how important the construction of a unified Europe has been. On the contrary – enlargement has been turned into a scapegoat for the EU's failures and for the internal social problems of Member States. Just think back to the Polish plumber and the Polish nurse. Then think back to 1950, 1955 or even 1960. Were the leaders and citizens of European nations dominantly talking about technical issues such as the free movement of people, the delocalisation of companies and the process of fiscal dumping while forgetting all about the political dimensions of the European construction and the benefits that over time would help Europe to become stronger and to achieve greater influence in global affairs? Surely not! That was an age in which the sufferings of World War II were still in living memory, and nothing was more important than to establish co-operation in pursuit of lasting peace and stability in Europe.

This primary goal is no less important today, but it has new dimensions. We no longer face conventional threats – one country threatening another. Today we face new threats which are far less distinct, but equally dangerous – terrorism, the spread of chemical and biological weapons, organised crime, drugs trafficking, illegal immigration. We are no different from the founders of the European Union in that we must continue to think about how best to maintain peace and stability in the world. The culture of the EU is such that armed conflict among member states is unthinkable, but threats against peace and stability can appear on the Union's borders or elsewhere in the world. The conflict in the Balkans was a bloody reminder of how true this is. Act of terrorism in Madrid in March 2004 made it clear to Europeans that our security is very much linked to processes elsewhere in the world.

Europe's strength is in its diversity, and the accession of new countries and new nations only makes the European Union stronger. We, Europeans are „united in diversity”, as it is written in the Constitutional Treaty of EU. The ideology of unitarism prevails only in totalitarian countries. We Latvians have experienced this to full degree, and so we will do everything to make sure that the spirit of tolerance and mutual comprehension in Europe continues to be the cornerstone for co-operation among the nations of our continent.

I am proud that my identity is based on the fact that I am a Latvian and a European. That is a positive value which unites me and my people with other European nations which hold the same values to be true. We, Europeans must have a deeper understanding of the two indivisible sides of our identity. We are all Poles, Italians, Greeks, Hungarians and Germans, but we are also all Europeans. It seems that at this time, being European is the second and perhaps less well understood side of our identity. We must understand that Europe is not an alien external force which can threaten our national identity or the political and economic interests of our individual countries. Europe is not just a source of income to enhance welfare, it is not just the common market. Europe is first and foremost a cultural space from which the universal values of our civilisation have emerged. It is in the name of these values that we, various European nations have come together voluntarily.



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Neither must we ever forget the close links which unify us with other countries in which the same values prevail. Anti-Americanism has become something of a fashion in Europe today. Please do not forget that the values which link our two continents are rooted in the European Age of Enlightenment and that the Americans, like we, the Europeans, are the children of that Age. Europe and the USA are allies, and the Baltic States and Eastern European countries wish to strengthen co-operation between both continents, between Europe and the United States.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

In conclusion I would like to return to the Baltic Sea. Please let me stress once again that the Baltic Sea region is of fundamental importance if we are to overcome the Stalinist division of Europe once and for all.

Over the subsequent 15 years, the Baltic Sea region has become one of the most dynamic regions of Europe and the world in political, social and economic terms. More than 65 million people live right along the shores of the Baltic Sea. If we add those who live inland, then we see that 120 million people are directly affected by the events and policies which are pursued in the Baltic Sea region. It is a region that has a highly educated workforce and a good infrastructure with no fewer than 76 ports. This allows us to consider the Baltic Sea region to be one of the most highly developed areas for business in the entire world. Coastal regions along all shores of the Baltic Sea are forecast to have good prospects for development over the next few decades, and this means that the importance of the Baltic Sea region will only increase in Europe.

Four Baltic Sea states have joined the European Union in 2004 – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. This has become a powerful stimulus for strengthening the economic role of the region in Europe and the world. We all agree that Europe must become more competitive and modern. The spirit of reform in the Baltic States and the ability of governments to take courageous albeit unpopular decisions prove that our nations are eager to overcome the backwardness that was forced upon us. Latvia's GDP growth has been among the highest in the world in recent years – a leap of 11.6 percent in 2006 alone. We are determined to maintain this dynamic growth, and we hope that it will help the European Union to rediscover clear goals, as well as political will to pursue those goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Latvia's statehood and nation are values that are rooted in Europe. Our nation has distinctive features that come from our Baltic heritage, folklore, farmer mentality and our closeness to the nature; and also from the trials and tribulations of history. Our identity emerges from our Baltic heritage, having evolved into a Latvian identity, has also become a European identity. Considering our heritage, geography and history, we are Europeans. But Latvians became a political nation only when the common national feeling became a part of the political ideas, value system and cultural heritage of modern Europe.

European heritage has always played a very important role in determining Latvia's destiny. During occupation awareness of our Latvian and our European identity served simultaneously as a tool of resistance and as an amulet of hope; it explains why we were not assimilated into the Soviet melting pot of nations. Therefore, today Latvia is not a post-Soviet republic; it is a flourishing member state of the European Union and NATO. We have returned to Europe to stand together with other European nations in defence of the European values against threats coming from totalitarian ideologies and regimes. It is in the name of these values that I hold firm to the idea that there is no New Europe or Old Europe. There is a united Europe, whole and free, in which each and every human being is of value.