

not waver from our course of patient, responsible support for Russian reform. It would be a terrible mistake to react reflexively to the ups and downs that Russia is experiencing and was bound to experience all along and will continue to experience in the years ahead, indeed, perhaps for decades, as it undergoes an historic transformation.

If the forces of reform are embattled, we must renew, not retreat from, our support for them. So we will continue again to lead a bipartisan effort here at home and an international coalition abroad to work with Russia and also with the other New Independent States of the former Soviet Union to support reform, to support progress, to support democracy, to support freedom.

We are well aware, too, of Central Europe's security concerns. We will never condone any state in Europe threatening the sovereignty of its neighbors again. That is why the United States protected Baltic independence by pressing successfully for the withdrawal of Russian troops.

In this period of great social and political change, we want to help countries throughout Central Europe achieve stability, the stability they need to build strong democracies and to foster prosperity. To promote that stability, the United States established the Partnership For Peace. And we have taken the lead in preparing for the gradual, open, and inevitable expansion of NATO. In just a year, the Partnership For Peace has become a dynamic forum for practical military and political cooperation among its members. For some countries, the partnership will be the path to full NATO membership. For others, the partnership will be a strong and lasting link to the NATO alliance.

Last month, clearly and deliberately, NATO began to map out the road to enlargement. Neither NATO nor the United States can today give a date certain for expansion, nor can we say today which countries will be the first new members. But let me repeat what I have said before: The questions concerning NATO expansion are not whether NATO will expand, not if NATO will expand, but when and how. And when expansion begins, it will come as no surprise to anyone. Its conditions, its timing, its military implications will be well and widely known and discussed in advance.

NATO membership is not a right. We expect those who seek to join the alliance to prepare

themselves, through the Partnership For Peace, for the obligations of membership; they are important. Countries with repressive political systems, countries with designs on their neighbors, countries with militaries unchecked by civilian control or with closed economic systems need not apply.

And let me say once again: Only the 16 members of NATO will decide on expansion. But NATO expansion should not be seen as replacing one division of Europe with another one. It should, it can, and I am determined that it will increase security for all European states, members and nonmembers alike. In parallel with expansion, NATO must develop close and strong ties with Russia. The alliance's relationship with Russia should become more direct, more open, more ambitious, more frank.

European security embraces a democratic Russia. But for Central Europe to enjoy true security, its nations must also develop not only military ties and security arrangements but also successful market economies. If we have learned anything about the new century toward which we are moving, it is that national security must be defined in terms that go far beyond military ideas and concepts. That's why we're all here. From Tallinn to Tirana, people must have good jobs so that they can provide for their families and feel the self-confidence necessary to support democracy. They must have the tools to adapt to this rapidly changing global economy. They must have economic confidence, in short, to believe in a democratic future.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States has played an important role in promoting these goals. We have strongly supported Central Europe's integration into the European Union. We have taken significant steps to improve access to our own markets, and we have provided Central Europe with financial aid, with technical support, and with debt relief. This assistance has been used for a staggering array of projects, from helping the Czech Republic draft a modern bankruptcy code, to training commercial bankers in Slovakia, to advertising and equipping modern and independent media throughout the region.

But for all our Government has done and will continue to do, the fact remains that only the private sector can mobilize the vast amounts of capital and the human skills and technology needed to help complete the transformation of Central Europe's free markets.