

*President Algirdas Brazauskas of Lithuania.* Dear Presidents, ladies and gentlemen, today we are signing the particularly important document with the United States of America, with which we not only share common values but are also linked by a number of American Lithuanians who have found home in the United States. The charter of partnership establishes the institutional framework that promotes the furtherance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, reciprocal support to the Euro-Atlantic integration, and common efforts designed for the consolidation of security, prosperity, and stability within the region and Euro-Atlantic area as the whole.

The U.S.-Baltic charter confirms repeatedly that Lithuania is a serious candidate for accession to NATO, as well as that the United States support the Baltic States' aspirations and their efforts to become members of the alliance.

Lithuania values the charter first and foremost as the commitment to its further role as the promoter of stability within our region and Europe as a whole, its commitment to progress, economic reforms, and further enhancement of defense system effectiveness and interoperability with the North Atlantic alliance. We appreciate and are supportive of President Clinton's and the U.S. role of leadership in opening up to Central European democracies the doors to history's most successful alliance. It is our hope that this openness to new members will enhance the security and stability for all the present and aspiring members, as well as other European nations.

Thank you.

*President Lennart Meri of Estonia.* Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, today is an historic day in the history of our four nations. With the signing of the charter of partnership among the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia, and the Republic of Lithuania, we enter a new phase of even closer United States-Baltic relations.

Seventy-five years ago last summer, the United States and Estonia—[inaudible]—diplomatic relations, thus launching a special relationship based in mutual respect and trust. There is an old saying that one recognizes a true friend in times of need. With its bipartisan support for nonrecognition policy, America was a true friend of the Baltics in a time of need, acting

as a beacon of hope throughout the long, dark, and cold years of the Soviet occupation.

You, Mr. President, were a true friend when, 4 years ago, you personally contributed to making sure that occupation would end and the foreign troops were withdrawn. This principled behavior is one quality of United States foreign policy that we greatly admire. The fact that morals play a major role in Americans' foreign policy is what defines the United States as the world's remaining superpower.

Estonia sees the United States-Baltic charter as the latest expression of that principled approach. The charter recognizes the Baltic States' role in the American strategy to guarantee security and stability on the European Continent, and spells out that the United States has a real, profound, and enduring interest in the security and sovereignty of the Baltic States.

An important element in our security strategy is eventual full membership in NATO. We believe that NATO continues to be the sole guarantor of security and stability in Europe. Estonia applauds President Clinton for his leadership in starting the process of NATO enlargement which has already redefined the terms of security policy in Europe.

Estonia also understands that NATO enlargement through the Baltics will be the next big project of the alliance. We believe that the question of Baltic membership in NATO will become the real test of post-Madrid security thinking—that is, that countries shall be able to choose their security arrangements regardless of geography. We are confident that, with American leadership, this test will be met with success.

Thank you.

*The President.* I thank you all. We are now going to sign our charter. Before we do, I just want to say again how much I appreciate all of our guests coming here, all from the three nations, their American counterparts. And thank you, Senator Durbin, Congresswoman Pelosi, Congressman Shimkus, Congressman Kucinich. Thank you, Senator Dole and Mr. Brzezinski.

And I'd also like to point out—I didn't earlier—we have a very large, unusually large, representation from the diplomatic corps here, which is a tribute to the importance of this moment, that the rest of the world community attaches to it. And I thank all the ambassadors who are here. Thank you all very much for your presence.