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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Baltic Presidents

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State
Samuel R. Berger, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State
Leon Fuerth, Assistant to the Vice President
for National Security Affairs
Marc Grossman, Assistant Secretary of State
for European and Canadian Affairs
Larry Napper, U.S. Ambassador to Latvia
Keith Smith, U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania
Walter Andrusyszyn, U.S. Chargé to Estonia
Stephen Flanagan, Special Assistant to
the President and Senior Director for
Central and Eastern European Affairs, NSC
Staff (Notetaker)
Tiina Ets, Interpreter (Estonia)
Alvin Skipsna, Interpreter (Latvia)
Emilija Sakadolskas, Interpreter (Lithuania)

Estonia

Lenert Meri, President
Kalev Stoicescu, Ambassador to the U.S.
Indrek Tarand, Chancellor, Permanent Under
Secretary
Sven Jurgenson, Director, Political
Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Kaja Tael, Interpreter

Latvia

Guntis Ulmanis, President
Valdis Birkavs, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ojars Kalnins, Ambassador to the U.S.
Ivars Millers, Chief of Staff

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Classified by: Glyn T. Davies

Reason: 1.5(b,d)

Declassify on: 30008

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Ieva Zalcburga, Interpreter

Lithuania

Algirdas Brazauskas, President

Algirdas Saudargas, Minister of Foreign
Affairs

Stasys Sakalauskas, Ambassador to the U.S.

Neris Germanas, Advisor to the President

Zita Makutiene, Interpreter

DATE, TIME

January 16, 1998, 1:40 - 2:25 p.m.

AND PLACE:

Cabinet Room

The President: Today is an important day. I just want to make a few remarks and really listen to what you have to say. (U)

The Charter of Partnership is an historic document and a demonstration of our commitment to advance integration of your countries into Western institutions through concrete initiatives. We welcome your aspirations to join the Alliance and are committed to keeping NATO's door open. The first round of enlargement will not be the last, but we need to get the first round right. Welcome your help. (U)

I applaud your efforts to work together and with your neighbors, particularly with Russia. We welcome the recent Lithuanian-Russian border agreement and hope that Russia will sign agreements with Estonia and Latvia soon. ~~(S)~~

We strongly support your accession to WTO, and I hope we can complete your three separate negotiations this year. I know you discussed this issue with Ambassador Barshefsky earlier in the week. She has since advised me that she discussed the problem on audiovisual with Sir Leon Brittan yesterday, and they agreed to work together expeditiously to find a solution. In fact, U.S. and EU officials will meet next week. But I want to underscore that I have made clear to Ambassador Barshefsky that this must be resolved this year. ~~(S)~~

Now, I really want to hear what you all have to say. (U)

President Meri: Thank you very much for your comments and your support to make this day possible. The Charter is truly an historic document and we welcome it. We are committed to moving forward on implementation. On WTO, we are very grateful for

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your commitment and hope that this can be resolved very soon. (S)

The President: Again, on WTO I just want to emphasize that we want this resolved this year. I truly believe that it is in the interest of the United States and the EU to work this out so that we don't stand in the way of your integration. (S)

President Meri: There is also the question of our membership in the OECD, which we hope can be resolved soon. At the same time, we are busy in Estonia developing our economy and building practical cooperation with all our neighbors, including Russia, as you mentioned. One of my favorite projects is the effort to get internet connections in every school in Estonia. I hope Mr. Vice President that when you arrive in the White House, sometime after the year 2000, that every school will be connected. (U)

President Brazauskas: I am most grateful for this opportunity to meet with you. A stable security system is important to Lithuania and to all of us. This Charter signing is the most important event on the political agenda of Lithuania this year and we look forward to its implementation. We desire NATO membership and are working through the development of our military forces and other actions to make this possible. We have, indeed, signed the Border Delimitation Treaty with Russia, and hope that this will spur others.

We are also working to put our relations with Belarus on a broader and more normal course. But still there are other problems that relate to the internal politics of Belarus.

I welcome your words on WTO. WTO and OECD membership are highly important to Lithuania. We recognize that we can't be members of these and other Western institutions unless we meet the criteria and clear up remaining problems. But I am grateful to all elements of the U.S. Government, particularly on the military side, for your help in this regard. (S)

The President: Thank you for those words. I welcome the Estonian border cooperation and also Lithuania's border agreements. (S)

President Meri: Our border agreement is nearly ready. (S)

President Ulamanis: Ambassador Napper speaks such beautiful Latvian, I am going to follow his example and deliver my remarks in English. I'll do my best. (U)

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The President: That's pretty good. Your English is a lot better than my Latvian. (U)

President Ulmanis: Mr. President, we have a common vision, economic, political and social. This is enshrined in the Charter of Partnership, which we fully embrace. We look forward to working actively on implementation. In fact, I would like to propose that we have the first quadrilateral meeting of the Partnership Council in Riga. ~~(S)~~

The 1994 NATO Summit has two formal objectives: to review progress of applicant countries towards membership and to set the agenda for the Alliance in the 21st Century. We want to be part of that vision. ~~(S)~~

Mr. President, thank you for your leadership and your support in our dealings with Russia. I have a vision of a new Russia that is a good neighbor. We are building practical cooperation with Russia to advance this goal. You can count on Latvia to do its part. I recently sent a letter to President Yeltsin expressing my hopes for further cooperation with Russia. I received a very cordial response that thanked me for my efforts to reconcile relations between Russia and Latvian society. ~~(S)~~

Finally, Mr. President, Latvia will be celebrating the 80th anniversary of its independence in November of this year. I would like to welcome you to Riga for this celebration. (U)

The President: I am encouraged by your vision of Russia and its relations with the Baltic states. I welcome your positive input and I think we have made some good progress. Now I know you have been concerned that Russia may delay its departure from the Skrunda radar facility. We expect Russia to abide fully by the terms of the agreement and have strong indications that Russia intends to do so. But we'll keep on top of this. I would like to ask Vice President Gore to say a few words. ~~(S)~~

The Vice President: This is an historic meeting. It will be looked back upon as important in the development of transatlantic and European relations. Your pleasures are matched by ours. I also look forward to working on the many practical areas of cooperation that we have outlined. (U)

Secretary Albright: We had a wonderful lunch at the State Department and really celebrated this day. We are delighted that Strobe will soon follow up as head of the Partnership

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Commission. One of the issues we discussed at lunch was our guests' concerns about Ukraine, and I would invite them to mention some of these to you, Mr. President. (S)

President Meri: Thank you, Madame Secretary. It may seem inappropriate for such a small country to speak of helping such a large country as Ukraine, but I think we have common experiences that can be of value to our friends in Kiev. Estonia has been successful in building up its financial and the banking sector. President Kuchma knows how to get things done, but he might be able to use some of the lessons of our experience in certain sectors, as a post-Soviet society, to good effect. One thing is clear, it is important that all of us support Ukraine. Because Ukraine's success is also a way to ensure democracy in Russia. (S)

President Brazauskas: I also want to say a word about Ukraine. Relations between all three Baltic states and Ukraine are good. Our security depends on stability and democracy being preserved in Ukraine. A month ago I had a meeting with President Kuchma and I feel that President Kuchma adheres to the same line. But his situation is very difficult. All the military factories are either closed down or at a standstill. Thousands of workers are affected. This common attention to Ukraine is helpful. (S)

President Ulmanis: I welcome this discussion. Ukraine's stability is critical to security in the region. Elections are coming up in Ukraine and the left-wing is active. I think that it is important that we engage Ukraine in our Hanseatic cooperation. (S)

By the way, I hope that the United States will play a role in the Council of the Baltic Sea States. (S)

The Vice President: We would welcome the opportunity to help advance regional cooperation and to include Ukraine. (S)

Secretary Albright: Also on Belarus, the three Presidents have some very interesting ideas on how to deal with this situation. We discussed this over lunch. (S)

President Brazauskas: Lukashenko has lost touch with reality and is only concerned with maintaining power. We need to appeal to the forces of reason in Belarus. Russia can play a constructive role here. We need to press ahead together with some of the ideas we discussed at lunch (NFI). (S)

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Deputy Secretary Talbott: The Council of the Baltic Sea States can be a practical vehicle for our engagement in regional cooperation. In particular, we want to participate in the Operative Committee of the Working Group on Organized Crime.

(C)

President Ulmanis: We discussed this in the Justice Department earlier today. We are in agreement with this. (C)

President Meri: One last point with regard to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. These can seem outdated now that the Cold War is over, but there are many tasks involved in building a democratic society, more than just having elections. Free media and the flow of ideas are also vitally important. (U)

Finally, let me say "I am delighted that Strobe Talbott will lead the "Joint Commission." It ensures solid implementation.

(U)

The President: Well thank you all very, very much. I think we need to proceed to the signing ceremony. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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