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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Presidents Ulmanis of Latvia,
Brazauskas of Lithuania and Meri of Estonia
(U)

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.
The President
The Vice President
Strobe Talbott, Acting Secretary of State
Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
Lawrence Taylor, U.S. Ambassador to Estonia
James Swihart, U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania
Larry Napper, U.S. Ambassador to Latvia
Samuel Berger, Deputy Assistant to the
President for National Security Affairs
Dan Fried, Senior Director for Central and
Eastern European Affairs, NSC Staff,
Notetaker
Alvin Skipsna, Latvian interpreter
Emilija Sakadolskis, Lithuanian interpreter

Latvia
Guntis Ulmanis, President
Ojars Kalnins, Ambassador to the U.S.
Armands Gutmanis, Presidential Adviser
Eva Eihmane, Interpreter

Lithuania
Algirdas Brazauskas, President
Alfonsas Eidintas, Ambassador to the U.S.
Povilas Gylys, Foreign Minister
Edward Tuskenis, Interpreter

Estonia
Lennart Meri, President
Toomas H. Ilves, Ambassador to the U.S.
Riina Kionka, General Director of the
Political Department, Foreign Ministry

DATE, TIME June 25, 1996, 1:50 - 2:30 p.m.
AND PLACE: Cabinet Room

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The President: It is a great pleasure to see you. I have looked forward to this meeting. (To President Ulmanis) Perhaps you can start, Mr. President. (U)

President Ulmanis: Thank you, Mr. President. I recall your visit to Riga two years ago. When I landed in the United States and saw your Statue of Liberty, I recalled how you visited our monument of freedom in Riga. Your visit symbolized your commitment to the freedom of the Baltic states and your support for our common values. I know that our visit here is a continuation of that process. (U)

The 20th century has seen great tragedies, but ultimately the values of Western civilization have shown themselves to be durable. It was principally to safeguard these values that the central institutions of the West -- the European Union and NATO -- were created. Latvia considers itself a part of Western civilization so it is natural that Latvia would want to join these key institutions. (U)

We are in the process of transforming ourselves to realize Western values -- the values of a tolerant, democratic and open society. The results of Latvia's presidential elections this month confirmed that these values are accepted in Latvia. With these elections, the government has gained the possibility to increase the pace of reforms and the pace of its approach to the EU and NATO. (U)

We understand that the way to the EU and NATO is through cooperation among the Baltic states and we see one another as partners in this process. Latvia sees its place as a country embedded in a unified Europe. There is no alternative; we do not wish to be isolated or apart. (U)

With respect to Russia, we felt until recently a trend of gradually improving relations. But recently, in the course of the Russian election campaign, we see some worrying trends. We frankly are concerned. Latvia does not have the feeling it can defend itself on its own and the recent changes in the CFE regime do not increase such feelings. (U)

The United States is the leader of security in Europe and should show the way forward. The Baltic states are located within Europe's security perimeter, if at the outer edge. Yet, Latvia doubts whether all NATO members really understand this. NATO speaks of enlargement to Central Europe, but what is the place of the Baltic states in this? The Baltic states should be included in this process from the beginning. We see that since your visit to Riga there has been a change much for the better. But we want this process to go even further. (U)

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President Brazauskas: Thank you for meeting with us here. To be quite direct, we look to your support for our membership in NATO, for a decision now in principle that the Baltic states ultimately will be included. The prospect of integration with the West has proven very important to convincing our people to proceed faster with reforms; it has solidified our pro-Western orientation and bolstered our cooperation with one another. Indeed, the prospect of integration with the West has strengthened our cooperation with Poland. We need your help to continue strengthening our democratic and economic reforms. (S)

Success of the Baltic states in reforms will help Russia by showing how reforms can really work. Our success and integration with NATO and the EU will bolster security throughout Europe. Lithuania is now developing a national defense system. Just five years ago, our people stood before Soviet tanks. Now Lithuania is active in the Partnership for Peace; we are helping with the implementation of the Dayton peace accords and are working with our neighbors. (S)

We need a clear sign that the West does indeed care about the Baltic states, about our democracy and market reforms. The enlargement of NATO means more security for all; it means our return to Europe. On May 28, we three wrote to you proposing that the Baltic states be included in NATO's enlargement process. I believe that Lithuania needs to be named as part of the "who" -- one of the countries that will join NATO eventually -- even if the "when" cannot yet be decided. We understand the difficulty of this challenge for NATO; we understand that not all possible NATO members can be added at once. So there is less concern about when we join NATO; the "when" depends on each country's preparations. But we wish to know that we will get there eventually. (S)

President Meri: Thank you, Mr. President. I have five points and will be brief. Next time I will have even fewer than five. (U)

First, against all odds and many expectations, despite the fact that we started well behind the Central European states, the Baltic states are leaders in reforms. (U)

Second, we hope Russia can do what we have done. But we cannot ignore the policies of threats and intimidation from Russia since 1991 and 1992. These come from the highest levels and lower down. We believe the U.S. should speak out against this. We greatly appreciate the U.S. evaluation of our progress in integrating the ethnic-Russian population. We note that Vice President Gore, during his visit to Tallinn in March 1995, called

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us a model to the world in this regard. We take this as a reference point. (S)

We urge you, Mr. President, to take a firmer stance toward Russia on these questions. The OSCE, the Council of Europe and the U.S. State Department have evaluated our policies toward the Russian minority and we accept this. Yet Russia's policy is calculated to slow down Estonia's integration, to isolate the Baltic states. This is not an issue on which one can split the difference but one in which truth must be respected. (S)

Three, Estonia understands the financial, political and other difficulties associated with NATO enlargement. We believe that the United States should state that the door to NATO remains open to the Baltic states. We believe that the United States should state that Russian threats directed at the Baltic states are not acceptable to you. Russian policies seek to draw a line through Europe; they refuse to accept the continuity of our statehood, which suggests that they do not really accept our independence. This is the real source of Russian opposition to Baltic membership in NATO. We frankly fear new lines being drawn by Moscow around the question of NATO enlargement. So we urge that you make clear, and that you do so publicly, that the Baltic states are part of the West and that the United States would resist efforts to change that fact. (S)

Four, I do not wish to focus on the CFE Treaty. The CFE regime serves the security of the region and the agreement and the recent changes have been signed and completed. We ask, however, that the U.S. show support for Baltic security through integration and through developing close consultations on security issues. (S)

Fifth and last, I ask you, Mr. President, to speak to President Yeltsin and to Chancellor Kohl with respect to the issue of the Baltic states. I hope you can enlist Kohl's support and Yeltsin's understanding that the U.S. is deeply interested in the Baltic states and supports Baltic integration. (S)

President Clinton: First, thank you for your statements. I wrote some notes down before our meeting and some more notes while you were speaking. Let me turn to these. (U)

First, I agree that the Baltic states are a great success story of the post-communist world. We seek the integration of the Baltic states with the West; that's what we want. There will be no secret deals about the Baltics with anyone. (S)

Second, with respect to NATO enlargement, the first new members to join the alliance shall not be the last. The Baltic states

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should be included in the new security order emerging in Europe, not excluded from any part of this process, including NATO. I cannot move independently of the other members of NATO, but you can see how I regard these issues, so you should not fear Baltic isolation. (S)

Three, we need to work to create facts of integration -- facts of economic, political and security cooperation. I thank you for your participation in the Partnership for Peace and in Bosnia. Your participation in Bosnia came at some expense and at some sacrifice. (S)

Four, in CFE we made the best arrangements we could in order to keep that treaty in force, to enhance the security that is in your interests. But we understand the need to consult with you and we will work with you. (S)

Five, with respect to Russian intimidation. I had a roundtable discussion with a group of Russians of all views during my last trip to Moscow. Many of these were reformers who do not at all support any imperial orientation or aggressive approach by Russia. But these people had the strong impression that there were problems with the Russian minority in Estonia and Latvia. These fears are exaggerated according to our information. I have spoken out against intimidation. But, on the other hand, these people, who would be your friends, had very strong views. Again, we believe their views are exaggerated, according to what we know. I will speak out against attempts at intimidation. But you should work to show those in Russia who do not want to define Russia's relations with its neighbors in terms of pressure and intimidation that you are aware of the need to establish multi-ethnic communities. Again, we think these accusations against the Baltic states are wrong, but we hope you can work at these issues anyway. (S)

President Meri: I agree with you. The day before yesterday I attended our victory celebrations in Narva, a frontier town on the Russian border. After the parade by the Estonian army I saw an outpouring of support from the many Russians there. I walked through the crowd and many simply trying to kiss me. The Russians there do not want to be part of this intimidation. They see that just across the river, only 50 meters away, things are quite different than they are in Estonia; it is another world. (S)

President Ulmanis: I have in my delegation here 30 businessmen. Half of these are not (ethnic) Latvians at all. These Russians are trying to form a new business-oriented world in which they can cooperate with the West. But the Russian government is trying to use these people against us. So let's counterpunch and

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not allow Russia to play this against us, which they will if there is no reaction from the West. (S)

President Clinton: I will have the chance to speak to Chancellor Kohl in a few days at the G-7. I will raise these issues. About Russian rhetoric, I understand that they are in the middle of an election and this can create exaggerations that should not necessarily bother you. I think also that the Russians have been very sobered by the experience in Chechnya. This may be beneficial in the long run because the experience may discourage them from thinking in terms of domination. I also think that the recent internal changes in Russia may be helpful. (S)

There is no doubt that I support Baltic freedom, integrity and integration. You should not overreact to Russian rhetoric which is being made with the election coming in just a few days. Someone mentioned the situation in Russia as being much different than in Estonia. There are some cities in Russia that are growing and dynamic. There is some good news. Elections often bring out inflammatory language and emotion. Kohl and I have only limited influence on events in Russia but we will discuss this and I will do what I can. (S)

Mr. Vice President, did you want to make a remark? (U)

The Vice President: Yes I did, but President Brazauskas wished to add something. (U)

President Brazauskas: We all spoke a great deal about NATO but please do not have the impression that this is self serving. For fifty years we were dominated; the results of WWII were abolished only in 1990. We are striving for a normal life, for normal politics. We are therefore striving for inclusion into NATO -- precisely to become normal. We understand that our approach may have awakened opposition in Russia, but Lithuania's relations with Russia are quite good. Still, you can play a great role; a statement from you can have a strong impact. We understand that we are on our own; that we must take care of our own problems domestically and in foreign relations. We are not bringing to NATO a whole set of problems. (S)

The President: Please understand I take no offense at your position. You are doing your jobs. You represent three democratic countries and I am very glad to see you. I don't know your history as you do but I have a good memory, from some distance, of what life was like before you were free. (S)

My hometown in Arkansas has a large Lithuanian community and I learned something of your history when I was growing up. When I

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went to Moscow years ago, as a student, I met an Estonian who had been a boxer on Estonia's Olympic team in the 1930s, during your independence. We spent New Year's Eve talking about what his country had been like when it was free. I knew a Latvian student then also and she spoke to me about what Latvia would be like when it became free in the future. So I understand your interests and respect them, even if I cannot say yet exactly what you want to hear. (C)

The Vice President: I would like to thank President Meri for the hospitality he extended to me during my trip to Tallinn in March 1995. Estonia's progress really is inspiring. You spoke of integration and there is another dimension to this via the Internet. I am not as familiar with Internet programs in Lithuania and Latvia, but Estonia has a very impressive plan in its schools. This also is important and can help. (U)

The President: Thank you all for coming. I think the Presidents stay here while the delegations proceed outside. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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