



Speech
by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at the Commemoration of the Millennium of Lithuania
Vilnius 6 July 2009

Majesties, Presidents,

Excellencies, Friends

When the people of Iceland united two decades ago in our support of freedom and democracy in the Baltic states, in solidarity with the historic fight on the streets and squares of this great city, we were acutely aware of the ancient history which binds us together.

The Icelandic Sagas, written on calfskin more than seven centuries ago, demonstrate that the Nordic region and the Baltic coast, the Atlantic Ocean and the plains of North-Eastern Europe were indeed a shared commonwealth of experience, fate and sometimes fighting.

The ancient texts of my nation describe, in a language we have preserved to this very day, how the Vikings journeyed to all our countries. They tell us of the Curonians who lived where now is Lithuania and Latvia and make us marvel at the excursions made to your region by the great poet Egill Skallagrímsson, who lived in Western Iceland a thousand years ago, and how others followed suit and went even further, all the way to Constantinople.

We can indeed rejoice in our common history and our shared legacy, but above all in being determined now to shape together a new future, an era of peace, progress and democracy.

The celebrations here today show how our deeply rooted culture can inspire us to aim even higher in the years to come.

The eight countries in Northern Europe — the five Nordic and the three Baltic states — now constitute a significant regional presence and have through growing cooperation, become an influential European and global voice. Our journeys have throughout the centuries often kept us apart, but now we are bound together by a common vision.

With these hopes, I bring you warm greetings from the people of Iceland, who proudly rejoice in the firm friendship we have enjoyed with you all.