



**Speech  
by  
the President of Iceland  
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson  
at  
a State Dinner  
in honour of  
the President of Lithuania  
Dalia Grybauskaitė  
Bessastaðir  
25 August 2011**

President of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė  
Your Excellencies  
Ladies and gentlemen

In the summer twilight, on the eve of an historic day, we welcome you to Bessastaðir where long time ago the strongest and most fruitful seeds in our quest for independence were sown in debates and discussions between the pupils and their teachers, where the renaissance of our language and respect for our culture became the foundations of modern Icelandic identity.

The spirit of independence, fostered in the school here at Bessastaðir during the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, remained so vigorous and alert in the soul of our people that it was inevitable that we should support your struggle with a unanimous declaration of our national will.

Tomorrow morning, Madame President, you will arrive with your delegation at Höfði House where, at exactly the same hour on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1991, the foreign ministers of Iceland and the three Baltic States signed the agreement which documented, for the first time, the full recognition of your independence and freedom.

For those of us who were fortunate to witness that historic event – some who were there twenty years ago will also join you tomorrow – this became a moving manifestation of how small nations can come together and take the lead in transforming the world.

It has somehow been forgotten that not everyone was in favour of our move. Powerful nations, both in Western and Eastern Europe, and across the Atlantic, urged caution and patience, but Iceland boldly went ahead, and within days others decided to follow.

Here tonight and tomorrow we commemorate these events and the people of Iceland are especially honoured that your State Visit coincides with this anniversary.

During the decades that followed, Lithuania has, together with its two Baltic partners, made enormous progress. You have joined the Atlantic Alliance, consolidated your position in Europe and dealt successfully with profound economic and social challenges.

It has not been an easy journey, but the results are among the most remarkable achievements in modern European history.

We only have to look back to the early 1990s to gain the relevant perspective. As the century was drawing to a close there were still influential countries within NATO and the European Union which maintained that the former boundaries of the Soviet Union should be the determining premise in the fate of nations, even though they were already free and sovereign.

Thus it became necessary for Iceland to step again forward and declare, together with a few others, that the Baltic countries should be granted full membership of NATO, a policy we expressed with our other Nordic partners at the summit in Madrid and reiterated when I made the first State Visits by an Icelandic president to your region.

Yes, our shared history harbours important examples of significant pathways built by the smaller members of the European family, showing how the course of history can be determined by those who are empowered only by ideals and vision, without military or financial power.

In the new century, the European mosaic is characterized by a greater number of small and medium-size states than ever before. Indeed, the transformation of the continent has brought independence to many nations which used to be under either totalitarian or imperial rule.

Democracy has become the foundation of our freedom, inspiring the growing cooperation between the Nordic and the Baltic nations. This Northern European network, composed of countries both within and outside the European Union, both within and outside NATO, has gradually developed into an effective and practical, result-orientated and

open-minded task force, influencing the work of international organisations.

This is evidence of the positive changes which the 21<sup>st</sup> century will, we hope, continue to foster, and it shows how nations which tyranny previously kept apart have now come together in an effective alliance.

The people of our countries have celebrated these new opportunities through ventures in the fields of music, theatre and other arts, through enterprises and many endeavours, through sharing the joy of being free and creative.

Your visit, Madame President, is a confirmation of our deep-rooted friendship, an expression of our determination to learn from each other.

Already in our discussions earlier today, you highlighted some of the lessons Lithuania can offer and tomorrow, at a roundtable discussion attended by representatives of political, economic and civil organisations, you will address the challenges facing Europe, how Lithuania's experience can throw light on the choices facing others.

Europe has certainly had its share of dramatic eras, oppression, military dictatorships, wars, crises, uprisings and riots. Recent events have reminded us all that long-cherished hopes can easily be broken by harsh realities. But Europe has also fostered democracy and the rule of law, brought human rights into the core of our constitutions, been a force for prosperity and scientific progress.

In the challenging times which Europe now faces, times of economic crisis and unresolved financial conflicts, fortitude can be derived from the wisdom and vision which have earlier led us to a better world.

The coming together of our countries on those days in August twenty years ago will, for decades and centuries, bear witness to how the democratic will of the people ultimately reigns supreme.

Empires fall, tyrannies surrender, but nations seeking to be free, independent and sovereign have been victorious in our times, both in Europe and all over the world.

These are the ideals we celebrate here tonight as we honour the outstanding achievements of your country.

In the spirit of friendship, and with profound respect, we welcome you, Madame President, and your delegation to Iceland and I ask our distinguished guests to raise your glasses in honour of the people of Lithuania and President Dalia Grybauskaitė.