National Capital Memorial Commission Unanimously Approves Favored Site for VOC Memorial

Washington, D.C. – The National Capital Memorial Commission voted unanimously on July 29 to approve a site at the northeast corner of Maryland and Constitution Avenues, NE for a memorial to the 100 million victims of communism. Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation Chairman Lee Edwards made a compelling case for the Foundation’s preferred location. He argued the site was fitting because it is within sight of the Statue of Freedom perched atop the U.S. Capitol Dome and because of its proximity to the headquarters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Edwards was supported by representatives of ethnic groups victimized by communism -- Marie Ciliberti from the Polish-American community, Anhthu Lu from the Vietnamese-American community, and Karl Altau from the Joint Baltic American National Committee (see Altau’s statement to the commission below). Marc Wheat from the House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy

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What a spectacular year it has been for the Baltic peoples and nations. In March Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania became full-fledged members of NATO and then in May of the European Union. In June there were elections to the European Parliament and now they have their representatives there as well. Our biggest dreams and aspirations of the last decade have come true!

But what’s next? That is the question that many have been raising and pondering, including the Board of JBANC. After long and careful deliberation, much discussion and word-smithing, we have produced a White Paper, which lays out a vision for the future for Baltic-American political activity.

The core of the document describes six specific projects or tasks with appropriate action steps. They deal with bearing witness to the legacy of communism; exporting democracy and “the Baltic experience” beyond the Baltics; engaging Russia in social, political, and economic dialogue; strengthening transatlantic integration and regional cooperation; expanding relations and cooperation with other ethnic organizations and political groups in the U.S. and the Baltics; and providing accurate information and timely policy analysis regarding Baltic affairs in the U.S. and abroad.

We can bear witness to the legacy of communism, for example, by supporting the building of the Victims of Communism Memorial in Washington, D.C. and by passing a Congressional resolution condemning the crimes of communism and seeking an apology from Russia. To expand democracy we can work for the passage of the Belarus Democracy Act in Congress and to help ensure fair elections this fall in Belarus and Ukraine. We should keep pointing out the deleterious effects of Putin’s oil and gas diplomacy not only for the Baltics but the United States and the rest of the world. We need to prepare a more sophisticated response to Russian attacks concerning Russian-speaking minorities, especially in Estonia and Latvia. To strengthen transatlantic integration, regional cooperation and U.S. engagement in the Baltics we should work to obtain funding (target of $2 million) in Congress for the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE). We need to increase cooperation and the sharing of information between the U.S. and the Baltics regarding trade, investment, tourism, culture, and sports.

As you can see, there is a lot to do. Please read the full text of our White Paper Baltic-American Political Activity: A Vision for the Future on the JBANC website. We welcome your comments and suggestions. But most of all, we invite your help.

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Summer 2004 in Riga

Finally, it is summer in Riga. The embassy garden on Raina Boulevard is bursting with red, white and blue flowers. Young couples sit close together on the benches along the canal, shaded by the large oak and linden trees. The hotels are so filled with guests that it is hard to find room for our Washington visitors. Big cruise ships from Helsinki and Stockholm are frequent sights on the Daugava.

Membership in NATO and the European Union ushered in newfound confidence and optimism. The Latvian economy is booming, and the World Bank predicts Latvia's gross domestic product (GDP) will grow 6.7 percent in 2004, two percentage points more than the average figure for the eight new EU member states.

The country has a good deal of fiscal flexibility. Overall government debt is about 16 percent of GDP in 2004, a much smaller figure than the debts of other new EU members.

Inflation is the only dark cloud on the horizon. The government projects prices will rise 4.5 percent in 2004. Higher inflation after EU enlargement has been observed in six out of eight new member states. My friend Ilmars Rimcevics at the Bank of Latvia is well aware of this danger and he is putting on the brakes, gently but firmly.

These official numbers confirm what we in the embassy see: the middle class is expanding, incomes are going up, and Latvia is becoming a more attractive market for investors and business.

At the end of July low cost Irish airline RyanAir announced they would begin service in November between Riga and London, Frankfurt and Tampere. That good news for price conscious passengers was quickly followed by a report that a direct Tashkent-Riga-New York flight will start soon. Meanwhile, AirBaltic is expanding its schedule and lowering some prices.

Some of this new transportation business has been stimulated by the government’s plan to reduce passenger fees at Riga airport. I think this is in line with the same philosophy that leads Latvia to keep corporate taxes low (currently 15 percent) and to encourage certain kinds of foreign direct investment with tax holidays.

Indeed, Latvia has been a friendly environment for business for a long time. The decisions taken soon after independence to return property to private owners and to privatize state-owned businesses were good ones. Sure, there were dislocations, unemployment, and profiteering. But, most importantly, putting the economy in private hands, in the hands of entrepreneurs, means that owners make decisions. As Lawrence Summers says: "In the history of the world, no one has ever washed a rented car."

This is why it is worrisome to hear some politicians arguing against finishing the privatization process in Latvia. A number of reasons are given to the public why it is not wise or timely to sell the state’s share of Latvenergo, Lattelekom, Ventspils Nafta, the Riga port, road building firms, and other state enterprises. I don’t agree.

The number one reason to finish the privatization process is to put as much as possible of the economy in private hands. Not only

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It is a great time to live in Belarus these days. That is of course if you ask President Aleksandr Lukashenka. He would say that the authorities are working diligently to protect the national security interests of the country and its people; that the comforts of students in higher education is extremely important to the education ministry; and that he has proposed a great strategy for the future of Belarusian energy by offering to burn more peat and lumber instead of oil and natural gas as a way to free the country from its dependency on imported natural resources. Most importantly, Lukashenka would lead us to believe that the people of Belarus are free and getting ready to exercise their democratic powers in open and transparent parliamentary elections this coming fall. Even more, it will be up to their democratic will to allow Mr. Lukashenka to seek an unconstitutional third consecutive term as the president of Belarus.

Here is the first example of how this dedicated, hard working Belarusian president is protecting the interests of his country and people. The definition of the term national security is very broad, according to Aleksej Begun, the Undersecretary of the Immigration Department of Belarus. He was announcing the extradition of Professor Allan Flowers, a British academic from Kingston University. Prof. Flowers was ordered to leave the country before August 3 and has been banned from re-entry to Belarus for the next five years. The professor was visiting the country by invitation from the National University of Belarus and was working with the members of the European Youth Parliament. He entered Belarus on July 9. Belarusian authorities tolerated his academic activities for a mere three weeks.

The second example concerns another education official, Nikolaj Lis, head of one of the departments of the Ministry of Education. Lis is extremely concerned about the creature comforts of the students studying at the European Humanities University (EHU) in Minsk. On August 3 Mr. Lis announced that the teaching license for EHU, the largest private pro-western university in Belarus, was being revoked due to the university’s “inability to provide students with adequate studying space.” The university was forced to suspend its academic activity after the EHU received an official letter from the government.

(Continued on page 10)
On July 2, 2004, the Lithuanian American Council (LAC) sponsored a gala reception marking the Baltic countries’ admission to NATO and to the European Union. Many honorable guests, including the Acting President of the Republic of Lithuania, Arturas Paulauskas, and his wife Jolanta graced the event.

The reception was held in the Amber Room at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago. A focal point of the reception was the honoring of former U.S. Congressman, Secretary Edward Derwinski. Derwinski served as U.S. Congressman for 22 years and later served in President George H. Bush’s cabinet as Secretary for Veteran’s Affairs. He was always in the forefront defending the interests of the Baltic States. In recognition of his service, he was awarded the Cross of the Order of Grand Duke Gediminas, which was presented to him by Acting Lithuanian President Arturas Paulauskas. In his comments, Secretary Derwinski remembered his long association with the newly re-elected president of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus. The former Congressman finished by saying: “You’re free, you’re safe, and God bless your home.”

Among those also in attendance were the Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to the U.S., Vygaudas Usackas, the Consul General of Lithuania in Chicago, Arvydas Daunoravicius, Lithuanian World Community President Gabrielius Zemkalnis, and former LAC president Anthony J. Rudis and his wife Maria Rudis, current president of the United Lithuanian American Relief Fund.

Saulius V. Kuprys, President of JBANC and LAC noted in his remarks that now that these twin goals—NATO and European Union admission—have been achieved through the ceaseless efforts of Baltic Americans working in all 50 States, JBANC is addressing new goals. He reported that the JBANC board has formulated and adopted a new American Baltic plan for future action. This plan has been published as a JBANC white paper entitled “Baltic-American Political Activity: A Vision for the Future.” Thus JBANC plans to undertake the following projects in the near future: to complete a memorial in Washington, DC to the victims of communism; to extend the “Baltic Experience” in democracy beyond the Baltic borders (to Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Caucasus Republics); to initiate political and economic dialogue with Russia; to strengthen trans-Atlantic integration through regional collaboration and the U.S. support in the Baltic region; to expand ties and cooperate with other ethnic organizations and groups in the U.S. and the Baltic region; to give accurate information and operational political analysis of Baltic activities in American and abroad.

Saulius Kuprys concluded by thanking the overflow crowd for attending the reception and for their continued support of JBANC. Proceeds from the gala were earmarked for LAC’s ongoing financing of JBANC activities.

During his visit to Chicago, Acting President Paulauskas also had a private meeting immediately before the LAC reception with the LAC board and participated in a press conference with Baltic media.
Key Kerry Foreign Policy Aide Meets with Central and East European Coalition

Rand Beers, a leading foreign policy advisor to the presidential campaign of Sen. John Kerry, met on two occasions recently with members of the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC) and other related ethnic organizations based in the United States. Meetings were held in New York on May 6 and in Washington DC on July 15. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright joined in during the latter discussion.

Beers, who served the previous four Presidents in senior-level positions, remarked on a number of U.S. policy areas important to the Central and Eastern European region, including some with relevance to the Baltic countries.

Mentioned were the importance of NATO as an alliance in combating terrorism and the contributions of coalition nations in the war against terrorism and in the Iraq campaign. Beers also felt that the recent closures of several U.S. international broadcasting services to the region were detrimental and that a Kerry presidency would look into ways of restoring VOA and RFE/RL broadcasting to Central and Eastern Europe.

Perhaps most specific to the Baltics, Beers expressed interest in establishing funding levels for the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE) program, which focuses on building cooperative security, healthy societies, and vibrant economies within the Nordic and Baltic region.

Other matters discussed at the meetings were Iraqi contacting, and visa and immigration issues. U.S.-Russia relations and the situation in Belarus were also areas of concern. One positive result of the meetings was that Sen. Kerry signed up as a co-sponsor to S.700 on July 8, thus giving his support for the Belarus Democracy Act.

JBANC, through its work in the CEEC, is reaching out to both the Bush and Kerry campaigns and hopes to continue the dialogue with both candidates leading up to the election.

New U.S. Ambassador to Estonia - Dr. Aldona Wos

Dr. Aldona Zofia Wos was sworn in on August 13, 2004 as the new U.S. ambassador to Estonia. She is the fifth U.S. ambassador to Estonia since 1991.

Ambassador Wos was born in Poland and emigrated as a child to the United States. Graduating from Marquette University, she studied medicine at the Warsaw Medical Academy. She spent many years as a physician in New York City before moving to Greensboro, North Carolina.

In 2002, President George W. Bush appointed Ambassador Wos to serve on the United States Holocaust Memorial Council and she was re-appointed in 2004. Her father, Paul Zenon Wos, is a survivor of the Flossenburg Concentration Camp, a former member of the Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa), and recipient of “Righteous Among the Nations” medal from Israel’s Yad Vashem for his role in saving the lives of Polish Jews.

Ambassador Wos was a major supporter of the 2002 Senate campaign of Elizabeth Dole (R-NC) and in 2003 was appointed North Carolina Finance Co-Chair for the 2004 Bush-Cheney campaign.

The White House announced her nomination on June 4, with a Senate confirmation hearing held on June 21. She arrived in Estonia on August 23 and is expected to present her credentials to President Arnold Rüütel in Tallinn in September.

Wos replaces Ambassador Joseph Michael DeThomas, a career State Department diplomat.
Welcome to NATO

Changed priorities and challenges for the newest NATO members

At the end of June 2004, seven new NATO members (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Slovenia) participated in their first Summit in Istanbul as full-fledged members of the alliance. As Stephen D. Mull, U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania said during a June conference at the Lithuanian Parliament, “It is a proud day for NATO to accept new members.”

The enlargement of NATO on March 29 was a landmark day in the history of Europe as the continent reshaped its geopolitical map. With security and stability now broadened, NATO brings new challenges for its fledgling Central and East European members.

The first challenge for the newest members is, as Lithuanian NATO envoy Ginte Damusyte points out, that some members may not be psychologically ready for membership. In other words, there may be difficulty in transforming to being inside the organization rather than on the outside looking in.

The “getting into NATO and EU” foreign and security policies for the new members became irrelevant once they joined and it will take time and motivation to develop new directions and priorities. However, with the top priority policy goals of the last decade achieved, many members have found it difficult to find a reason to move forward with the same intensity as before the enlargement.

The second psychological challenge for new members is their place within the alliance. Many remember Chirac’s divisive “two-tiered Europe” statement, in which the post-enlargement era question of equal membership was transformed from the theoretical to a practical level.

The third challenge that the new members face in NATO is adapting to the organization’s changing mission and security strategy, which has already modified over the last decade. As Jamie Shea, Deputy Assis-

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Congressional and Baltic Caucus Update

As the 2004 U.S. November elections near, national and international focus is on the Bush-Kerry showdown. At the same time, 34 Senate races and seats for the entire House of Representatives are to be decided. Some of these races and other changes deserve a closer look, as they will affect the composition of the congressional Baltic Caucuses for the start of the 109th Congress in January.

There are currently almost 100 Baltic Caucus members in the House and Senate. These Caucuses comprise one of the more member-rich interest groups in the U.S. Congress, thanks to the attention of Members of Congress and the active interest of Baltic-American voters who remain politically engaged.

The House Caucus, co-chaired by Representatives John Shimkus (R-IL) and recent presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich (D-OH), saw three new members join their ranks in July. They are Representatives Roy Blunt (R-MO), Kay Granger (R-TX), and Roger Wicker (R-LA). All three visited Latvia in June. In August, additional delegations from both the House and Senate visited the Baltics.

In November’s Senate elections, incumbents are running for twelve Republican and fourteen Democratic seats. There are also three open Republican and five open Democrat seats.

Illinois Republican Peter Fitzgerald is set to retire after a single term. Fitzgerald, like Illinois Democrat Carol Moseley-Braun before him, is a Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus member. The race to fill his open seat is one of the more compelling ones, between Barack Obama, a hit at the Democratic National Convention, and one-time presidential candidate Alan Keyes.

Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus members running for re-election are Republicans Charles Grassley of Iowa and George Voinovich of Ohio, along with Democrats Barbara Boxer of California and Maryland’s Barbara Mikulski.

In the House, the Baltic Caucus currently has 77 members (42 Democrats and 35 Republicans), although six long-serving members are retiring. One is European subcommittee chairman Doug Bereuter (R-NE), a JBANC Baltic Democracy Award recipient in 2003. Bereuter also serves as the President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

Rep. William Lipinski (D-IL) of Chicago announced his retirement on August 13. He is now backing as his replacement his son Daniel Lipinski, a political science professor at the University of Tennessee.

Congressman Porter Goss (R-FL) was nominated in August by President Bush to head the CIA. Another Baltic Caucus member, Peter Hoekstra (R-MI) was named on August 25 as Goss’ successor as chairman on the House Intelligence Committee.

The three other House Baltic Caucus members retiring are Nick Smith (R-MI), Jim Turner (R-TX) and Democrat Joseph Hoefelf of Pennsylvania, who has entered the Senate race in hopes of unseating Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA).

Another Texan member, Martin Frost (D-TX), is facing a tough re-election opponent in Pete Sessions (R-TX), in a gerrymandered district.

JBANC REQUESTS CONGRESSIONAL PROBE OF MINORITY ISSUES

JBANC has requested a public hearing or briefing in the U.S. Congress before the Commission on Security and

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M-BEC Moves to Deepen Ties Between the Baltics and Maryland

On Wednesday, 21 July 04, the Maryland-Baltic Educational Consortium (M-BEC) held its quarterly working-lunch meeting in Rockville, Maryland at JBANC. During this meeting the discussion focused around the recent grant that M-BEC received from the State Department via the U.S. Embassy in Tallinn, Estonia. This grant will be used by M-BEC to strengthen ties between the Baltics (especially Estonia) and the USA (especially Maryland).

M-BEC is made up of colleges, towns, counties, businesses, and individuals in the Baltics and the U.S., especially Maryland. It is a non-profit organization that is an outgrowth of NATO’s Partnership for Peace program where states such as Maryland were linked to countries like Estonia via the National Guard. Attendees at the meeting included the Honorable Mary Ann Saar, an Estonian-American, who is the Maryland Secretary of Public Safety and Correctional Services, former Maryland State Senator Frank Komenda, and many representatives of universities.

Visa Fee Waiver Bill Introduced in House

A House bill that supports waiving the fee for processing visitor visas to the U.S. was introduced on July 14, 2004 by Congressmen William Lipinski (D-IL).

Co-sponsors of the bill, H.R. 4834, are Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-IL) and Jack Quinn (R-NY), who along with Rep. Lipinski is a co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Central and Eastern Europe.

H.R. 4834 would recognize allied troop contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan by offering citizens of those affected countries waivers on visa fees. These now amount to $100, a figure very steep for many and even more so since the fees are not returned even if the visa request is denied.

Of the ten countries named in the bill, Poland has the largest contingent of troops in Iraq, and has the third largest contingent overall after the U.S. and Great Britain. After Poland, with its 2300 troops, the nine other countries named in the bill add nearly 2500 additional troops. Baltic troop totals in Iraq currently total 327 (150 from Latvia, 130 from Lithuania and 47 from Estonia). The ten countries also have nearly 200 troops in Afghanistan.

Poland and the other countries named in the bill are currently ineligible for the U.S. Visa Waiver Program. Twenty-eight countries are eligible, but these also include Spain, which recently pulled its entire contingent out of Iraq, following the spring train bombings and parliamentary elections.

Over 360,000 non-immigrant visas were included in the FY2003 application workload for the nationals of the ten countries listed. The figures for the three Baltic countries totaled 34,939 (9340 for Estonia, 10,199 for Latvia, and 15,400 for Lithuania).
Help Not Wanted: National Security 
Belarus Style

(Continued from page 4)

government of Belarus on July 21 notifying the university of termination of rent for the academic building hosting most of the EHU programs and facilities. Other private schools of higher education have been closed in the last few years in accordance with the new vision of a unified education system in Belarus, which incorporates mandatory political information and propaganda elements as part of the curriculum.

Ongoing civil repression and attacks on the rights of free speech and assembly have intensified in the last few months. The lack of international recognition for the approaching fall elections is a clear indication of this. In the latest move to intimidate and eliminate political opposition, the authorities, by a ruling of the Highest Court of Belarus, have closed one of the main opposition parties, the Belarusian Labor Party. The Labor Party, under Aleksandr Buchvostov, is one of the cornerstones of the opposition alliance Five Plus, which unites five main opposition parties as well as other political organizations, including over 200 NGO’s and labor unions operating both in and out of Belarus.

It is becoming painfully clear that Lukashenka and the current regime in Belarus are determined not to lose the election and, unfortunately, it will not be up to the people of Belarus. Under the provisions of current election laws, the election process is too one-sided to be able to provide even minimal objective oversight of ballot registration, vote casting, and ballot counting. That is especially true if there will not be any opposition left on the ballots before the October 13 vote. With the Labor Party out, the coalition Five Plus is facing possible procedural penalties based on its legal status, and now each candidate will be allowed to spend only $450 in state-provided funding on his or her campaign. With no access to national media sources, and having to face constant intimidation in the form of arrests and searches and seizures of property, the opposition candidates don’t stand a chance.

The hope for democracy is dying in Belarus and it does not look like the people will be able to overcome the autocratic rule of Lukashenka by themselves. For example, on July 21, a peaceful demonstration was held in Minsk by the opposition alliance Five Plus, which unites five main opposition parties as well as other political organizations, including over 200 NGO’s and labor unions operating both in and out of Belarus.

It is becoming painfully clear that Lukashenka and the current regime in Belarus are determined not to lose the election and, unfortunately, it will not be up to the people from the official number given by the Interior Ministry: 193 persons), the reporter who made the report was sent out of the country and the station was closed.

Aleksandr Lukashenka is not taking any chances with his term in office, which expires either this fall or in two years, depending on whether one sees the term as legitimate and/or official. The discrepancy occurred after he extended his first term by two years during the illegal and unrecognized referendum in 1996. Lukashenka has already made up his mind to run again, but is clearly not certain if another referendum is the way to do it, since it may spark protests. However, he already hinted that he would run if the people of Belarus will let him. He has also said that the legislature is not yet ready for a referendum, but could be very soon.

As soon as I make the decision, said Lukashenka I will announce the referendum. He also added that he is certain of his victory in the upcoming election. If I were Lukashenka, I would also be certain.

It is a great time to live in Belarus these days – at least for Lukashenka and his supporters.

Simonas Girdzijauskas
JBANC
JBANC This Summer

JBANC’s Program Director Relocates to Vilnius to Pursue Expanded Role

As part of a new mission of the organization and its restructuring strategy, Simonas Girdzijauskas, Program Director of JBANC has relocated to the Baltics and will be working from Vilnius, Lithuania. The change is targeted at generating more objective and accurate information and analysis of current events, expanding the network of contacts and coordinating certain JBANC activities with Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian governments and NGOs. The move will also provide an opportunity to collect first-hand data and research material on “Exporting Democracy” projects, primarily related to the autocratic regime of Alexsandr Lukashenka and the attempts by the national opposition movements to restore democracy and the rule of law in the Republic of Belarus.

In addition, Mr. Girdzijauskas will head the civic society education project of the Civic Society Institute in Vilnius, Lithuania. The aim of the project is to develop an adult education network in Lithuania and to create an open dialog environment to better explain the fundamentals of the democratic society, and individuals’ role in it. He is also working with transatlantic organizations to help organize and facilitate international conferences and meetings.

JBANC is committed to its goal to provide objective information and analysis on issues of interest to the Baltic – American community.

2004 Summer Interns at JBANC

Two interns have helped out at JBANC during the summer of 2004. Elina Spule, from Riga, was in the office from May-June and Petras Kuprys, from Chicago, from July-August.

Elina Spule attended the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire during the past year and is a junior at Riga Stradins University’s Faculty of European Studies, studying public relations.

She is a member of European Movement in Latvia, and had the opportunity to attend seminars about EU all around Europe. She has also been involved with the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS) at the

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National Capital Memorial Commission Unanimously Approves Favored Site for VOC Memorial

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and Human Resources, who was instrumental in collecting support from twenty-seven members of Congress for the memorial, also testified. The next step will be approval of the site at fall meetings of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission. (From VOC website).

For more about the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, please visit: www.victimsofcommunism.org

To support the effort to build the memorial, House Baltic Caucus co-chairman Rep. John Shimkus (R-IL) introduced House Resolution (H. Res.) 752 on July 22, 2004. The resolution is currently co-sponsored by Congressmen Mark Souder (R-IN) and William Lipinski (D-IL), who besides being a member of the Baltic Caucus is also co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus on Central Europe.

Statement of Karl Altau to the National Capital Memorial Commission Regarding the Victims of Communism Memorial July 29, 2004

Dear Chairman Parsons and Members of the Commission. My name is Karl Altau and besides being a Board Member of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, my day job is as the Managing Director of the Joint Baltic American National Committee, Inc. (JBANC), where I have served for over seven years.

I would like to emphasize the great support the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian - American communities in the United States have for this project. It was my parent’s generation that came, thankfully, to the U.S. as a result of the terrible crimes of Soviet communism. That generation is now quite old and we do not have much time before they too are gone. Communism wreaked immense havoc not only in the Baltic countries, which were illegally and forcibly occupied by an extremely intolerant regime and political system, but also throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

Our Baltic-American communities have long had many friends and allies among the communities of Central and Eastern Europeans here in the United States. We have stuck together for over 50 years to fight against the oppression and horror that communism wrought and to help set this record straight for future generations.

The United States was steadfast in its policy of non-recognition against the illegal occupation and annexation of the Baltic countries and in helping to defeat communism in that part of the world. We are very happy to see the support continue, in the name of the congressional resolution (H. Res. 752) introduced last week advocating the construction of the Victims of Communism Memorial, which we are discussing today. We thank our many friends in Congress including Congressmen Souder, Lipinski and Shimkus in seeing this project through.

We thank the Commission for its support as well and look forward to working with you in this very important endeavor.

-end-
Summer 2004 in Riga

(Continued from page 3)

will private owners and shareholders make the right decisions, invest properly, increase productivity and grow the business. They will be much less likely to mix politics and business, at the expense of both.

Together with my colleagues at the embassy, and especially economic and commercial officer Mark Draper, I am trying to find ways to stimulate more business between the United States and Latvia. We are pleased to see so many Americans making visits to the Baltics, exploring the market, and asking our advice. We at the embassy are happy to use our knowledge and contact network to put people together with potential partners.

Earlier this spring we worked closely with the Michigan National Guard to bring a forty-person group of business and civic leaders to Latvia for match-making meetings and plant visits. We are actively lobbying the Latvian government to find fair and equitable solutions to problems with the bureaucracy faced by a couple American companies. Later this month I will help an American company from Oregon announce their decision to invest $50 million dollars in a new production facility in central Latvia.

Our biggest effort, however, is the September 2-4 summit of 100 women business leaders from America, Latvia and nearby countries. President Vike-Freiberga and I joined together in this project, believing that "economic development not only creates jobs and prosperity, it creates strong partners, allies and friends." We have the help of former U.S. Ambassador to Finland Bonnie McElveen-Hunter (who created the concept in Helsinki in 2002) and we enjoy strong support from the State Department, our embassies in the region, the AmCham and the Latvian business community.

In the United States, women-owned businesses represent more than 38 percent of all U.S. businesses and employ more workers than the Fortune 500 companies; 70% of new businesses in the United States are owned by women; they have grown at a rate double that of all other U.S. businesses. I don’t have similar figures for Latvia, but as we prepared for this conference, we have been pleasantly surprised to learn how many women-owned businesses there are, how honest and successful they are, and how fast they are growing.

Latvia has a long record on gender equality. This was the fifth country in the world to give women the right to vote and stand for office. With women heading the presidency, the legislature, several ministries, and many successful businesses and corporations, it makes great sense to me to use this summit as a way to promote investment, business deals and startups. And, if as a result of this summit, fifty of America’s top CEO’s and entrepreneurs return to their boardrooms fired up by the business opportunities and bright people in the Baltics – well, that will be a good start.

I can speak for my colleagues in Vilnius and Tallinn as well when I say, anywhere in the Baltics, “your American embassy is open for business.”

For forty-three years, JBANC has sought and obtained the assistance of both political parties in its struggle first to restore, and then to secure and maintain the independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. For this reason, JBANC has consistently avoided endorsing any political party or individual candidate. Adherence to this policy is especially important in this election year. Still, the recent passage of former President Ronald Reagan requires that JBANC eulogize his contributions towards the restoration of Baltic independence.

We are not unique in this endeavor as leaders, former dissidents and ordinary citizens across Central and Eastern Europe have expressed their gratitude for the help President Reagan provided in ending decades of forced occupation.

Though many in both political parties gave lip service to the idea of liberating the Baltic countries, President Reagan was the first major political figure to take the issue seriously. While the vast majority of elected officials in both parties and our government bureaucracy sought to retain the existing status quo with the Soviet Union, Reagan chose to confront this evil empire. Without question, President Reagan's controversial characterization of the Soviet Union as "an evil empire" brought about great condemnation from leaders around the world. Still, the common man around the world instinctively knew he spoke the truth. In this effort, President Reagan was frequently forced to act without the support of others, leading to frequent criticism from all quarters. Inspired by the advice of his political advisors, Reagan continued to press the Soviet Union and eventually brought about the political and economic collapses of the Soviet Union.

His support in recognizing the "Captive Nations" of the world and his proclamations on Baltic Freedom Day (June 14) were an inspiration and reminder that there existed a light at the end of the tunnel.

Professor Toomas Gross, an Estonian professor of anthropology at the University of Helsinki, has summarized President's Reagan's contributions for many in Eastern Europe. "The actual role played by President Reagan in bringing down the Soviet Union is debatable, but he surely..."

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JBANC This Summer

(Continued from page 11) University of Latvia and made a presentation there in 2002 on Latgale. In Latvia she also worked on various public relation projects, including as a press center assistant for the Luge World Championship in Sigulda, Latvia, in February 2003, the Freestyle and Women's Wrestling European championship, held in Riga in May 2003 and as press center manager for the Latvian Open golf tournament, held in Riga, Latvia in August last year.

At Eau Claire, Elina was elected president of the Baltic Student Organization (BSO). During spring semester this year Elina, with the BSO, helped assist Professor Paulis Lazda of the History and Politics Department in organizing a Symposium of Eastern and Central Europe (April 1-3, 2004, UWEC). Elina was also involved in the Model United Nations Club, UWEC.

At JBANC, Elina assisted in work on a book on NATO enlargement, being funded by the World Federation of Free Latvians, her internship sponsors. She also worked closely on projects dealing with the Victims of Communism Memorial and took part in finalizing JBANC’s White Paper, published in mid-June.

During her time here, she had opportunities to visit many offices around Washington, DC, including the U.S. Congress, the Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian embassies, the US-Baltic Foundation, and Radio Free Europe. She also spoke on her experiences at a class on Northern Europe and the Baltics at George Washington University.

After returning to Riga Stradins University, Elina plans to acquire a Master’s degree in International Relations and later specialize in U.S.-Baltic relations. When returning back to Latvia her first U.S.-Baltic related project will be leading orientation week for American students from the University of Wisconsin system.

Petras Kuprys is a native of Chicago, where he has worked at the Lithuanian-American Council national headquarters for the past three summers. During the school year he attends Northwestern University on a four-year full tuition Evans Scholarship. He is getting ready to begin his senior year as a film major. The second oldest of six children, Petras has been active in the Lithuanian-American community since his youth.

ALA intern Mara Zalite, Latvian Ambassador Aivis Ronis, and JBANC intern Elina Spule meet at the Latvian Center in Rockville, Maryland

“JBANC, Elina assisted in work on a book on NATO enlargement, being funded by the World Federation of Free Latvians”

-end-
Welcome to NATO

(Continued from page 7)

tant Secretary General for Ex-
ternal Relations noted, after the
seven countries entered NATO,
they have found a different or-
ganization from the one they
applied to join. However, not
only must the new, but all
members of the alliance need to
adapt to changes, thereby al-
lowing new members to con-
tribute equally to a new 21st
century vision for the transat-
lantic security alliance.

The mission of NATO changed
significantly after the fall of the
Soviet Union as it developed
into an international security
organization from a defensive
one. A “defense vs. security”
alliance could be compared to
one which is “closed vs. open.” Members in both
types of organizations are
united by the common inter-
est of values and security. A
“closed” organization serves
as a united block to counter a
common threat or enemy (i.e.
the Soviet Union during the
Cold War) and stands ready to
defend its members, hence
making it a “defense organiza-
tion.” However, in an “open”
organization, the role of val-
ues shifts from being the moti-
vation to unite to something
that should be projected onto
others. “Projecting stability”
has become one of NATO’s
new ideological phrases.

Robert Bradtke, U.S. Deputy
Assistant Secretary of State for
European and Eurasian Affairs,
during his testimony before a
House subcommittee on
Europe, stated that NATO is
“alliance in action”. With its
role in anti-terrorism efforts,
military operations in the Bal-
kans, Afghanistan and now a
role in training the army of
Iraq, NATO has transformed
itself from a static defense or-
ganization into a security alli-
ance of the future.

Simonas Girdzijauskas
JBANC

Congressional and Baltic Caucus Update

(Continued from page 8)

Cooperation in Europe
(CSCE) on the topic of the
roots of the Russian minority
issue in the Baltic countries.

Given the current tensions in
relations between the Baltic
countries and Russia, JBANC
is paying close attention to
the CSCE’s contribution to
the formulation of U.S. policy
within the Organization for
Security and Cooperation in
Europe (OSCE).

At the recent OSCE Parlia-
mentary Assembly annual
meeting in July in Edinburgh,
Scotland, the Russian Federa-
tion delegation introduced
and the Assembly passed a
Resolution on National Minor-
ities, with support from the U.S.
delegation, which included
Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL)
and Steny Hoyer (D-MD). The
resolution contained language
critical of Latvian and Estonian
policies, despite years of favor-
able reporting from interna-
tional observers, including the
OSCE. There was no criticism
of minority issues in any other
country.

The CSCE, also known as the
Helsinki Commission, is a bi-
cameral body composed of U.S.
Senators and Representatives
and Executive Branch represen-
tatives. The current Chairman is
Chris Smith (R-NJ) and the Co-
Chairman is Senator Ben Night-
horse Campbell (R-CO), who is
retiring at the end of this ses-
ion of Congress.

It has been over ten years since
the Helsinki Commission has
held a hearing on the topic of
minority issues in the Baltics.

The Commission was estab-
lished in 1976 to implement the
Helsinki Final Act. It played an
important role in the 1970’s
and 1980’s in gathering and
disseminating information on
Soviet human and national
rights violations. Its role in the
downfall of communism and
the Soviet Union was signifi-
cant.
On July 12, 2004, Valdas Adamkus was sworn into office as President of Lithuania, where he will serve his second term as President. His first term was from 1998-2003.

A June 13 special election was called after former President Rolandas Paksas was removed from the post by the Parliament on April 6, following a seven month long impeachment process. Pakas was impeached on three counts of constitutional violations for his actions while serving in office, making him the first leader in Europe to be removed from office by impeachment.

None of the five presidential candidates succeeded in securing over 50% of the popular vote during the first round, therefore extending the race for the post to a second round. The odds-on-favorite, Adamkus, 77, defeated Kazimiera D. Prunskiene, 66, the head of the Farmer’s and New Democracy Party, and a member of the Lithuanian Parliament, by 52% to 47% in the final round of the election on June 27. Ms. Prunskiene was Prime Minister of the first independent government in 1991. During a difficult political situation in the transitional period, her government held power for only eight months.

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For a complete election overview go to: www.jbanc.org/background.html
played at least a symbolic role for people. During the tumultuous era of Soviet occupation, Reagan's tough approach gave some hope, even if many did not approve of his policies elsewhere. As a result, President Reagan is commonly given at least some of the credit for Baltic independence because he took a visible stand against the occupiers” (from “Ronald Reagan, 1911-Eternity”, by Gavin Kalan, in Six Degrees, Summer Issue 6, 2004 25.6-26.8.2004, http://www.6d.fi)

For his efforts, JBANC pays homage to this great former American president. In the words of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher - Reagan was "a truly great American hero."

Henry Gaidis
JBANC