

Your Excellencies, people of Latvia, dear friends!

It is a great honour for me to participate in the celebrations of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adaptation of the Constitutional Law on the Statehood of the Republic of Latvia.

Standing before this great monument, dedicated to Freedom, brings back memories of the sacrifices of the Latvian people; fighting for their rightful status as an independent and sovereign state.

Living under tyranny and occupation for decades caused immense hardship and suffering upon the people of Latvia. The events of the late 1980's unfolding the relatively shift collapse of the Soviet Union came as a surprise to many in the West and not without a cost to your people. We honour the memory of the tens of thousands deported under Soviet rule, the memory of those who lost their lives under Soviet rule, and the brave Latvians who lost their lives in the Barricades in January 1991.

The reestablishment of independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Latvia, and the Baltic States, was an immensely important historic event; not only for you, the people of Latvia, and your neighbours – but for Europe and western democracy. And thus on international scale

With profound pride I can say that Iceland's role in the reestablishment of the independence of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania was an important one. The government of Prime Minister Oddsson strongly supported the claim of independence. During my numerous visits to Latvia, and other Baltic Countries, I have learned to understand, that the brave acts of Foreign Minister Hannibalsson – who so appropriately is present here today, with his wife Bryndís - is and will be remembered with gratitude and admirations.

After Iceland's recognition of Latvia's independence and when signing and confirming the establishment of diplomatic relations between Iceland and the three Baltic States, in Reykjavik, August 25<sup>th</sup> 1991, Mr Janis Jurkans underlined that: "the small nations of Europe have to be united". The presence of representatives from the Nordic states and your Baltic neighbours today proves that Jurkans' vision has been realized.

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On behalf of Althingi, the Parliament of Iceland, and the people of Iceland I congratulate you on this important occasion, wishing the people of Latvia all the best. You may be ensured that Iceland will continue to be a friend and supporter of Latvia in the future.