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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

January 16, 1998

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT CHARTER SIGNING CEREMONY

East Room

2:45 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. President Meri; President Brazauskas; President Ulmanis; members of the Estonian, Lithuanian, and Latvian delegations; Secretary Albright; Mr. Berger; members of Congress, Senator Dole, Mr. Brzezinski, and all friends of the Baltic nations who are here.

The Vice President and I and our administration were honored to welcome President Meri, President Brazauskas, and President Ulmanis to Washington to reaffirm our common vision of a Europe whole and free, where Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia play their full and rightful roles, and to sign a Charter of Partnership to build that Europe together.

To the three Presidents, let me say thank you. Thank you for the key role you have played in making this moment possible; holding to the difficult path of political and economic reform; leading Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania back to the community of free nations where they belong.

This Charter of Partnership underscores how far your nations have come. Almost exactly seven years ago today, Baltic citizens were facing down tanks in the struggle to reclaim their independence. Today your democracies have taken root. You stand among Europe's fastest growing economies. Your nations are a source of stability within your region and beyond, through the Partnership for Peace, the Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion, and your contributions in Bosnia.
America has been proud to support this progress, through our seed assistance program, more than 500 Peace Corps volunteers, and in many other ways. We share a stake in your success. And with this charter we set out a framework to achieve our common goals. It affirms our commitment to promoting harmony and human dignity within our societies. It stresses our interest in close cooperation among the Baltic states and with all their neighbors. It launches new working groups on economic development to spur greater trade, investment, and growth, complementing the efforts of our European friends. And it furthers America's commitment to help Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia to deepen their integration and prepare for membership in the European Union and NATO.

Of course, there can be no guarantees of admission to the Alliance. Only NATO's leaders, operating by consensus, can offer membership to an aspiring state. But America's security is tied to Europe, and Europe will never be fully secure if Baltic security is in doubt. NATO's door is open to every partner nation, and America is determined to create the conditions under which Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia can one day walk through that door.

The hopes that fuel the goals of this charter must be matched by our will to achieve them. That's why we're forming a new partnership commission which Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott will chair. I'm pleased to report that the charter is making a difference already. Yesterday our nations signed treaties to eliminate double taxation, which will encourage American business to play an even greater role in Baltic prosperity. We're also expanding our common efforts to combat organized crime with better information-sharing and more joint operations.

And this year the United States, in a unique public-private partnership with the Soros Open Society Institute, will be creating a Baltic-American Partnership Fund to promote the development of civic organizations. Nothing is more crucial to democracy's success than a vibrant network of local groups committed to their communities and their nation. I want to thank George Soros for his visionary generosity.

I also want to say a special thanks to the Baltic American communities. For 50 years Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian Americans kept alive the dream of Baltic freedom. Now on the verge of a new century, they are working here at home and with
their Baltic brothers and sisters to make sure the hard-won blessings of liberty will never be lost again.

President Meri, President Brazauskas, President Ulmanis, we recall the August day in 1989 when hundreds of thousands of people linked hands from Tallinn to Riga to Vilnius, forming a human chain as strong as the values for which it stood. Today that Baltic chain extends across the Atlantic Ocean. America's hands and hearts and hopes are joined as one with yours. Working together we can build a new Europe of democracy, prosperity, and peace, where security is the province of every nation. And the future belongs to the free.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT ULMANIS: Dear President, ladies and gentlemen, today is a happy day as we are signing the U.S.A.-Baltic Charter. This charter will serve as a key for the next century. It makes us allies. Our signatures provide the strategic philosophy for the next century. They mark strong Atlantic -- and also the formation of a new Europe. The Baltic region is a success story for all who shape it by their everyday work.

I call on President Clinton and his administration to get actively involved in the formation of its future. The symbolic meaning of the charter has been expressed in its first words, which speak about our common vision of the future. It has been created by people of our country in continuous work by mutual enrichment. I am proud of my people and its strengths. I am proud of my friends who I am happy to welcome here.

Thank you. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT BRAZAUSKAS: Dear President, ladies and gentlemen, today we are signing the particularly important document with the United States of America, with which we not only share common values, but are also linked by a number of American Lithuanians who have found home in the United States. The Charter of Partnership establishes the institutional framework that promotes the furtherance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, reciprocal support to the Euro-Atlantic integration and common efforts designed for the consolidation of security, prosperity, and stability within the region and Euro-Atlantic area as a whole.

The U.S.-Baltic Charter confirms repeatedly that Lithuania is a serious candidate for accession to NATO, as well as that
the United States supports the Baltic states' aspirations and their efforts to become members of the Alliance.

Lithuania values the Charter first and foremost as the commitment to its further role as the promoter of stability within our region and Europe as a whole; its commitment to progress, economic reforms, and further enhancement of defense system effectiveness and interoperability with the North Atlantic Alliance. We appreciate and our supportive of President Clinton's and the U.S. role of leadership in opening up to Central European democracies the doors to history's most successful alliance. It is our hope that this openness to new members will enhance the security and stability for all the present and aspiring members, as well as other European nations.

Thank you. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT MERI: Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, today is an historic day in the history of our four nations. With the signing of the Charter of Partnership among the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia, and the Republic of Lithuania, we enter a new phase of even closer United States-Baltic relations.

Seventy-five years ago last summer, the United States and Estonia -- entered diplomatic relations, thus launching a special relationship based in mutual respect and trust. There is an old saying that one recognizes a true friend in times of need. With its bipartisan support for non-recognition policy, America was a true friend of the Baltics in a time of need, acting as a beacon of hope throughout the long, dark and cold years of the Soviet occupation.

You, Mr. President, were a true friend when, four years ago, you personally contributed to making sure that occupation would end and the foreign troops would withdraw. This principled behavior is one quality of United States' foreign policy that we greatly admire. The fact that morals play a major role in America's foreign policy is what defines the United States as the world's remaining superpower.

Estonia sees the United States-Baltic Charter as the latest expression of that principled approach. The Charter recognizes the Baltic States' role in the American strategy to guarantee security and stability on the European Continent, and spells out that the United States has a real, profound, and enduring interest in the security and sovereignty of the Baltic States.
An important element in our security strategy is eventual full membership in NATO. We believe that NATO continues to be the sole guarantor of security and stability in Europe. Estonia applauds President Clinton for his leadership in starting the process of NATO enlargement which has already redefined the terms of security policy in Europe.

Estonia also understands that NATO enlargement through the Baltics will be the next big project of the Alliance. We believe that the question of Baltic membership in NATO will become the real test of post-Madrid security thinking -- that is, that countries shall be able to choose their security arrangement regardless of geography.

We are confident that with American leadership, this test will be met with success. Thank you. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: I thank you all. We are now going to sign our charter. Before we do, I just want to say again how much I appreciate all of our guests coming here, all from the three nations, their American counterparts. And thank you Senator Durbin, Congresswoman Pelosi, Congressman Shimkus, Congressman Kucinich. Thank you, Senator Dole and Mr. Brzezinski.

And I'd also like to point out -- I didn't earlier -- we have a very large, unusually large, representation from the Diplomatic Corps here, which is a tribute to the importance of this moment that the rest of the world community attaches to it. And I thank all the ambassadors who are here. Thank you all very much for your presence. (Applause.)

(The charter is signed.) (Applause.)

END

3:05 P.M. EST
For Immediate Release

January 16, 1998

A CHARTER OF PARTNERSHIP
AMONG THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AND THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA, REPUBLIC OF LATVIA, AND
REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

Preamble

The United States of America, the Republic of Estonia, the
Republic of Latvia, and the Republic of Lithuania, hereafter
referred to as Partners.

Sharing a common vision of a peaceful and increasingly
integrated Europe, free of divisions, dedicated to democracy,
the rule of law, free markets, and respect for the human rights
and fundamental freedoms of all people;

Recognizing the historic opportunity to build a new Europe, in
which each state is secure in its internationally-recognized
borders and respects the independence and territorial integrity
of all members of the transatlantic community;

Determined to strengthen their bilateral relations as a
contribution to building this new Europe, and to enhance the
security of all states through the adaptation and enlargement of
European and transatlantic institutions;

Committed to the full development of human potential within just
and inclusive societies attentive to the promotion of harmonious
and equitable relations among individuals belonging to diverse
ethnic and religious groups;

Avowing a common interest in developing cooperative, mutually
respectful relations with all other states in the region;

Recalling the friendly relations that have been continuously
maintained between the United States of America and the Republic
of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia, and the Republic of
Lithuania since 1922;

Further recalling that the United States of America never
recognized the forcible incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and
Lithuania into the USSR in 1940 but rather regards their
statehood as uninterrupted since the establishment of their
independence, a policy which the United States has restated continuously for five decades;

Celebrating the rich contributions that immigrants from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have made to the multi-ethnic culture of the United States of America, as well as the European heritage enjoyed by the United States as a beneficiary of the contributions of intellectuals, artists, and Hanseatic traders from the Baltic states to the development of Europe; praising the contributions of U.S. citizens to the liberation and rebuilding of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Affirm as a political commitment declared at the highest level, the following principles and procedures to guide their individual and joint efforts to achieve the goals of this Charter.

**Principles of Partnership**

The United States of America has a real, profound and enduring interest in the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and security of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The United States of America warmly welcomes the success of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in regaining their freedom and resuming their rightful places in the community of nations.

The United States of America respects the sacrifices and hardships undertaken by the people of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to re-establish their independence. It encourages efforts by these states to continue to expand their political, economic, security, and social ties with other nations as full members of the transatlantic community.

The Partners affirm their commitment to the rule of law as a foundation for a transatlantic community of free and democratic nations, and to the responsibility of all just societies to protect and respect the human rights and civil liberties of all individuals residing within their territories.

The Partners underscore their shared commitment to the principles and obligations contained in the United Nations Charter.

The Partners reaffirm their shared commitment to the purposes, principles, and provisions of the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE documents, including the Charter of Paris and the documents adopted at the Lisbon OSCE Summit.

The Partners will observe in good faith their commitments to promote and respect the standards for human rights embodied in the above-mentioned Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) documents and in the Universal Declaration on
Human Rights. They will implement their legislation protecting such human rights fully and equitably.

The United States of America commends the measures taken by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to advance the integration of Europe by establishing close cooperative relations among themselves and with their neighbors, as well as their promotion of regional cooperation through their participation in fora such as the Baltic Assembly, Baltic Council of Ministers, and the Council of Baltic Sea States.

Viewing good neighborly relations as fundamental to overall security and stability in the transatlantic community, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania reaffirm their determination to further enhance bilateral relations between themselves and with other neighboring states.

The Partners will intensify their efforts to promote the security, prosperity, and stability of the region. The Partners will draw on the points noted below in focusing their efforts to deepen the integration of the Baltic states into transatlantic and European institutions, promote cooperation in security and defense, and develop the economies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

A Commitment to Integration

As part of a common vision of a Europe whole and free, the Partners declare that their shared goal is the full integration of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into European and transatlantic political, economic, security and defense institutions. Europe will not be fully secure unless Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania each are secure.

The Partners reaffirm their commitment to the principle, established in the Helsinki Final Act, repeated in the Budapest and Lisbon OSCE summit declarations, and also contained in the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, that the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible.

The Partners further share a commitment to the core principle, also articulated in the OSCE Code of Conduct and reiterated in subsequent OSCE summit declarations, that each state has the inherent right to individual and collective self-defense as well as the right freely to choose its own security arrangements, including treaties of alliance.

The Partners support the vital role being played by a number of complementary institutions and bodies -- including the OSCE, the European Union (EU), the West European Union (WEU) the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), the Council of Europe (COE), and the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) -- in achieving the
partners' shared goal of an integrated, secure, and undivided Europe.

They believe that, irrespective of factors related to history or geography, such institutions should be open to all European democracies willing and able to shoulder the responsibilities and obligations of membership, as determined by those institutions.

The Partners welcome a strong and vibrant OSCE dedicated to promoting democratic institutions, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. They strongly support the OSCE's role as a mechanism to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts and crises.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania each reaffirm their goal to become full members of all European and transatlantic institutions, including the European Union and NATO.

The United States of America recalls its longstanding support for the enlargement of the EU, affirming it as a core institution in the new Europe and declaring that a stronger, larger, and outward-looking European Union will further security and prosperity for all of Europe.

The Partners believe that the enlargement of NATO will enhance the security of the United States, Canada, and all the countries in Europe, including those states not immediately invited to membership or not currently interested in membership.

The United States of America welcomes the aspirations and supports the efforts of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to join NATO. It affirms its view that NATO's partners can become members as each aspirant proves itself able and willing to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and as NATO determines that the inclusion of these nations would serve European stability and the strategic interests of the Alliance.

The United States of America reiterates its view that the enlargement of NATO is an on-going process. It looks forward to future enlargements, and remains convinced that not only will NATO's door remain open to new members, but that the first countries invited to membership will not be the last. No non-NATO country has a veto over Alliance decisions. The United States notes the Alliance is prepared to strengthen its consultations with aspirant countries on the full range of issues related to possible NATO membership.

The Partners welcome the results of the Madrid Summit. They support the Alliance's commitment to an open door policy and welcome the Alliance's recognition of the Baltic states as
aspiring members of NATO. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania pledge to deepen their close relations with the Alliance through the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the Partnership for Peace, and the intensified dialogue process.

The Partners underscore their interest in Russia's democratic and stable development and support a strengthened NATO-Russia relationship as a core element of their shared vision of a new and peaceful Europe. They welcome the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the NATO-Ukraine Charter, both of which further improve European security.

**Security Cooperation**

The Partners will consult together, as well as with other countries, in the event that a Partner perceives that its territorial integrity, independence, or security is threatened or at risk. The Partners will use bilateral and multilateral mechanisms for such consultations.

The United States welcomes and appreciates the contributions that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have already made to European security through the peaceful restoration of independence and their active participation in the Partnership for Peace. The United States also welcomes their contributions to IFOR, SFOR, and other international peacekeeping missions.

Building on the existing cooperation among their respective ministries of defense and armed forces, the United States of America supports the efforts of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to provide for their legitimate defense needs, including development of appropriate and interoperable military forces.

The Partners welcome the establishment of the Baltic Security Assistance Group (BALTSEA) as an effective body for international coordination of security assistance to Estonia's, Latvia's and Lithuania's defense forces.

The Partners will cooperate further in the development and expansion of defense initiatives such as the Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion (BaltBat), the Baltic Squadron (Baltron), and the Baltic airspace management regime (BaltNet), which provide a tangible demonstration of practical cooperation enhancing the common security of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and the transatlantic community.

The Partners intend to continue mutually beneficial military cooperation and will maintain regular consultations, using the established Bilateral Working Group on Defense and Military Relations.
Economic Cooperation

The Partners affirm their commitment to free market mechanisms as the best means to meet the material needs of their people.

The United States of America commends the substantial progress its Baltic Partners have made to implement economic reform and development and their transition to free market economies.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania emphasize their intention to deepen their economic integration with Europe and the global economy, based on the principles of free movement of people, goods, capital and services.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania underscore their commitment to continue market-oriented economic reforms and to express their resolve to achieve full integration into global economic bodies, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) while creating conditions for smoothly acceding to the European Union.

Noting this objective, the United States of America will work to facilitate the integration of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with the world economy and appropriate international economic organizations, in particular the WTO and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), on appropriate commercial terms.

The Partners will work individually and together to develop legal and financial conditions in their countries conducive to international investment. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania welcome U.S. investment in their economies.

The Partners will continue to strive for mutually advantageous economic relations building on the principles of equality and non-discrimination to create the conditions necessary for such cooperation.

The Partners will commence regular consultations to further cooperation and provide for regular assessment of progress in the areas of economic development, trade, investment, and related fields. These consultations will be chaired at the appropriately high level.

Recognizing that combating international organized crime requires a multilateral effort, the partners agree to cooperate fully in the fight against this threat to the world economy and political stability. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania remain committed to developing sound legislation in this field and to enhance the implementation of this legislation through the strengthening of a fair and well-functioning judicial system.
The U.S.-Baltic Relationship

In all of these spheres of common endeavor, the Partners, building on their shared history of friendship and cooperation, solemnly reaffirm their commitment to a rich and dynamic Baltic-American partnership for the 21st century.

The Partners view their partnership in the areas of political, economic, security, defense, cultural, and environmental affairs as contributing to closer ties between their people and facilitating the full integration of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into European and transatlantic structures.

In order to further strengthen these ties, the Partners will establish a Partnership Commission chaired at the appropriately high level to evaluate common efforts. This Commission will meet once a year or as needed to take stock of the Partnership, assess results of bilateral consultations on economic, military and other areas, and review progress achieved towards meeting the goals of this Charter.

In order to better reflect changes in the European and transatlantic political and security environment, signing Partners are committed regularly at the highest level to review this agreement.

FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

FOR THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA:

FOR THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA:

FOR THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA


# # #
"BALTIC" CHARTER SUMMARY

The Charter of Partnership, signed on January 16, 1998 by the presidents of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the United States, is a political statement of common principles that will guide the deepening of mutual cooperation and advance common objectives, including Baltic integration into the European and transatlantic communities. It makes clear the Baltic states are part of the U.S. vision for a new Europe and that they will not be left out or discriminated against due to factors of history or geography.

- It notes that the United States has a "real, profound, and enduring" interest in their security and independence of the three Baltic states.

The Charter begins with expression of commitments by the four governments to shared principles and a common vision for a secure, prosperous, and undivided Europe. It notes how U.S.-Baltic cooperation can contribute to the integration of the Baltic states.

- In that context, the Charter notes the shared goal of Baltic integration into European and transatlantic institutions, such as the European Union, OSCE, the World Trade Organization and NATO.

- On NATO, the Charter recalls the Madrid Summit Communiqué language and notes that the United States welcomes Baltic aspirations and supports their efforts to join NATO. It also reaffirms U.S. policy that NATO's partners can become members as each aspirant proves itself able and willing to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and as NATO determines that the inclusion of these nations would serve European stability and the strategic interests of the Alliance.
The Charter affirms a shared commitment to promotion of harmonious and equitable relations among individuals belonging to diverse ethnic and religious groups. The parties affirm their desire to develop close cooperative relationships among all the states in Northeastern Europe.

The Charter takes note of the progress of existing bilateral working groups on security and military affairs, and establishes new bilateral working groups on economic reform, trade, investment and related fields. Each year these groups will review progress on bilateral objectives and set the agenda for the year ahead.

- The Charter also establishes a "Partnership Commission," headed by the Deputy Secretary of State, to review annually the activities of the bilateral military and economic working groups.

The Charter in no way pre-commits the United States to Baltic membership in NATO. The Baltic states will have to meet the same criteria and standards expected of other states. So too, the Charter does not offer "back-door" security guarantees. The Baltic governments understand, and have said so publicly, that such guarantees can only come through NATO membership. The Charter is not an alternative to NATO membership, nor is it an effort to regionalize the security of the Baltic states.

# # #
Visit by the Presidents of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania
Signing of the Charter of Partnership

Significance of the Visit

This visit will strengthen U.S. bilateral relations with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and give further dynamism to our efforts to advance the integration of these states into the European and trans-Atlantic communities.

The visit builds on the Administration’s earlier efforts to promote these goals, particularly the Baltic Action Plan of September 1996. This Action Plan called for a Charter of Partnership that would clarify the principles upon which U.S. relations with the Baltic states are based and provide a framework for strengthening ties and pursuing common goals.

During their visit to the United States, January 13-16, the three Baltic Presidents will meet with President Clinton to sign the Charter of Partnership and discuss the overall direction of relations. They will also meet with other senior U.S. government officials to implement several concrete improvements in our relations including steps that will expand trade and investment, strengthen the development of the private sector in the Baltic region, advance defense reforms, and deepen cooperation on issues of mutual concern, including combating organized crime.

The three Presidents will also meet with business and civic leaders, members of Congress, and the Baltic-American communities.

Background

For over fifty years, successive U.S. Administrations maintained a strong policy of non-recognition of the forcible incorporation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into the former Soviet Union. The United States has played a critical role in helping these states implement democratic and free market reforms and strengthen their security and sovereignty since the reestablishment of their independence in 1991.

Since 1991, the United States has provided the Baltic states with over $128 million under the Support for East European Democracy Program (SEED), to advance fundamental economic and political reforms. In 1994, the United States established the Baltic-American Enterprise Fund, capitalized at $50 million, to promote the growth of small and medium-sized businesses in these countries.

Through the Law and Democracy Program we are helping these three countries and other emerging European democracies to combat organized crime and corruption. Through the SEED program and other efforts we have been helping CEE states improve their customs, banking regulations, and police training.
More than 400 Americans have served as Peace Corps volunteers in the three countries since 1992. There are presently 128 volunteers working on a variety of projects, including English language training and advising small entrepreneurs in business practices.

The United States has greatly expanded its security and military assistance with the Baltic states. They have received over $XX under the President's Warsaw Initiative security assistance program as well as over $10 million in equipment and services to develop the Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion, elements of which are serving with NATO SFOR in Bosnia today. A U.S.-sponsored Regional Airspace initiative, various military education and training programs, and close cooperation with counterparts in the Michigan, Maryland, and Pennsylvania National Guards have also contributed to the development of their armed forces.

The United States has also provided about $8.5 million for the demolition of the ex-Russian large phased-array radar at Skrunda, Latvia and $2 million for the clean up of the former Russian nuclear reactor facility at Paldiski, Estonia.

What is the Charter?

The Charter of Partnership is a political statement of common principles that will guide the deepening of mutual cooperation and advance common objectives, including Baltic integration into the European and transatlantic communities. It makes clear the Baltic states are part of the U.S. vision for a new Europe and that they will not be left out or discriminated against due to factors of history or geography.

- It notes that the United States has a "real, profound, and enduring" interest in their security and independence of the three Baltic states.

The Charter begins with expression of commitments by the four governments to shared principles and a common vision for a secure, prosperous, and undivided Europe. It notes how U.S.-Baltic cooperation can contribute to the integration of the Baltic states.

- In that context, it notes the goal of Baltic integration into European and transatlantic institutions, such as the European Union, NATO, and the World Trade Organization.

- On NATO, the Charter builds on the Madrid Summit Communique language. The United States welcomes Baltic aspirations and supports their efforts to join NATO. It also reaffirms U.S. policy that NATO's partners can become members as each aspirant proves itself able and willing to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and as NATO determines that the inclusion of these nations would serve European stability and the strategic interests of the Alliance.

The Charter affirms a shared commitment to promotion of harmonious and equitable relations among individuals belonging to diverse ethnic and religious groups. The Charter stresses the promotion of close cooperative relationships throughout the Baltic region, in particular to the enhancement of bilateral relations among the Baltic states and neighboring states.
The Charter takes note of the progress of existing bilateral working groups on security and military affairs, and establish a new working group on economic reform, trade, investment and related fields. Each year these groups will review progress on our bilateral objectives and set the agenda for the year ahead.

- The Charter also establishes a “Partnership Commission,” headed by a senior State Department official, to review annually the activities of the independent military and economic bilateral working groups.

**What the Charter Isn’t.**

While the Charter welcomes Baltics aspirations for NATO membership, it in no way pre-commits the United States to Baltic membership. The Baltic states will have to meet the same criteria and standards expected of other states.

Neither does the Charter offer “back-door” security guarantees. The Baltic governments understand, and have said so publicly, that such guarantees can only come through NATO membership. The Charter is not an alternative to NATO membership, nor is it an effort to regionalize the security of the Baltic states.

**Implementation Already Underway**

In addition, the following undertakings will also be realized, reflecting fleshing our Charter’s framework:

**Baltic/American Partnership Fund:** As we wind down the SEED programs in the Baltics, $7.5 million in appropriations will be matched by a grant from the Soros Foundation to endow a Baltic-American Partnership Fund. The Fund will be chartered to give grants to promote the development of non-governmental organizations. This legacy of the SEED program will strengthen and help consolidate civil society in the Baltic states.

**Double Tax Treaties:** These treaties with all three states will be signed to eliminate double taxation as a way to foster trade and investment.

**Anti-Crime Initiative:** The FBI and the Justice Department -- drawing on the work of attaches in the Baltic and Nordic states, Poland, and Russia -- will undertake new efforts to expanded cooperation with the Baltic states in combating crime, to include information sharing and joint operations. The United States is also prepared to participate in the Operative Committee of the Council of Baltic Sea States’ Task Force on Organized Crime. This work will help establish a stable, secure business climate essential to the growth of Baltic trade and investment and also serve U.S. trans-national law enforcement efforts.

**MOU on Agricultural Cooperation:** Will provide for an annual exchange of agricultural missions.