

# What NATO means for us

**Sandra Kalniete,**  
**The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia**

Latvia is ready to share responsibilities and costs. A defense budget totaling 2% of the annual GDP is allocated at present and will remain at this level until 2008. It allows us to shoulder the financial commitments associated with our membership in NATO. Latvia is considering its own contribution to the NATO Response Force. Along with an infantry battalion specifically trained for peace operations, Latvia is developing specialized units of military medics, divers, explosive ordnance disposal units and military police that could effectively fill gaps in NATO's collective capabilities. Additionally, a decision has been taken to develop capabilities in nuclear, biological and chemical defense, mine clearing divers, and special operations.



**Ģirts Valdis Kristovskis,**  
**The Minister of Defence of the Republic of Latvia**

Today, even the most ardent opponents of NATO enlargement must agree that the invitation of the three Baltic states to join NATO is no longer an unfulfilled dream, but a reality. The decisions of the Copenhagen and Prague NATO Summits to extend an invitation to Latvia and the other candidate countries to begin NATO and EU accession talks not only fulfilled their national goals, but also created new consequences and responsibilities. Those decisions destroy the myth that security is only meant for large countries and must remain an illusion for smaller ones.

