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Two Sisters: *Polonia's* Support to Lithuania

Reconciliation of Lithuania and Poland is surely one of the happiest developments of the last decade. The Commonwealth of both nations will not return. Lithuania, and Poland are today equal and sovereign states. But our common past has left a feeling of family. As I have said before, Lithuania and Poland are like two sisters who once lived under the same roof and today live separately - but they remain sisters.

Poland, already under the protective umbrella of NATO, now has the historical opportunity from within the alliance to become the zealous champion of Lithuania and its security. It should lobby tirelessly for the acceptance of Lithuania into the Atlantic Alliance. It is unacceptable that the border of NATO should be allowed to separate our two countries.

Presidents Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Valdas Adamkus (like his predecessor, Algirdas Brazauskas) are working together in this spirit. They enjoy the full support of both governments, both parliaments and both nations. The Polish president, prime minister and minister of foreign affairs do not miss any opportunity in their meetings with Western statesmen to urge that Lithuania be admitted to NATO.

No other two countries have so many common institutions as Lithuania and Poland. To name a few: Polish-Lithuanian Consultative Committee of Presidents, Polish-Lithuanian Parliamentarian Assembly, Inter-Governmental Cooperation Council, and The Polish-Lithuanian Forum of Territorial Governments. The Polish Club of Friends of Lithuania publishes Polish and Lithuanian views in the quarterly, "Lithuania".

Some old stereotypes may still linger. There are still problems to be solved. But solutions can be found with patience goodwill and understanding, particularly with regard to the Polish community in Lithuania and the Lithuanian minority on the Polish side of the border. Indeed, I believe an important turning point was reached in 2000 when the Polish citizens of Lithuania appealed to the Polish American Congress to mobilize their rank and file members in an effort to win security for Lithuania. The appeal deeply moved and motivated millions of American of Polish background. I feel confident that at the right time the Polish American Congress will encourage the very active Polish-American community to send letters and telegrams to the American President, Administration, senators and congressmen demanding their support for Lithuanian membership of NATO with the same zeal that they displayed in support of Poland's membership. The massive support of *Polonia* may play a strategic role in influencing the decision of the US government.

Since harmonious cooperation between our two states was never better than now, Polish citizens of Lithuania and Lithuanian citizens of Poland no longer face a conflict of loyalty. They may remain faithful to their national heritage they may educate their children in their mother tongue, send them to Polish or Lithuanian schools and to be at the same time loyal citizens of their Lithuanian or Polish state.

The Polish artist Jan Matejko, depicted the common victory of Lithuanians and Poles in the Battle of Grunwald. In his gigantic painting he placed the leader of the Lithuanian troops, Grand Duke Vytautas, in the very center of his picture. The painting "Battle of Grunwald" can thus be seen as a symbol of the restored brotherhood of our two nations. Poland and Lithuania will support each other and together will join the Community of European Nations.