

LITHUANIA ASSUMES OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP

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Lithuania feels privileged to have the opportunity to lead the Organisation just after the first OSCE Summit since 1999, the outcomes of which have a great influence on the agenda for the Lithuanian chairmanship in 2011. During our chairmanship a particular attention will be paid to such important issues as energy security, protracted conflicts resolution, promotion of sub-regional cooperation, strengthening OSCE role in Afghanistan, tolerance education and freedom of the media. Among other important tasks of our chairmanship will be the process of appointing a new Secretary General and an ODIHR director. A big challenge for Lithuanian chairmanship is to maintain our overarching goal to rebuild trust and confidence in order to strengthen security in Europe.

When celebrating 20th anniversary of Lithuanian independence, our national slogan was “In freedom we believe”. This simple phrase contains an important message not only to Lithuania, but to other Central and Eastern European states as well. The main achievement for all of us is freedom. Freedom to create, to think, to move, to express ourselves, to take our own decisions on our lives and our security is what really matters.

Lithuania has re-emerged as an active member of the European and global community. In 1990, when the Heads of State of the CSCE gathered in Paris, Lithuanian representatives could not be present there. Just twenty years ago the Lithuanian Parliament called upon the World community for the recognition of independence, and today Lithuania is about to start chairing the biggest regional security organization. Isn't it a remarkable turn of events? Kazakhstan's Chairmanship is even more important example of recognition of the States that have had to walk a long way through history in order to become sovereign and independent. The faster all countries proceed towards economic prosperity, regional security, respect and support for human dimension issues, the stronger the OSCE, and each and every participating state, will be.

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One of the top priorities of Lithuanian Chairmanship is the Energy Security. This is a complex issue, directly related to climate change, environmental security and sustainable economic development. Lithuania has been active in the OSCE dialogue on energy security and has hosted the Energy Security Conference in Vilnius in September 2010. To cope with these challenges, consolidated efforts and solutions are needed as well as the broad involvement of all stakeholders, including business and civil society. The OSCE can offer effective tools to promote dialogue for better understanding and various forms of cooperation – regional and cross-dimensional. The Baltic States have long been structurally dependent on imported energy. Therefore we understand the necessity to jointly develop common principles in the field of energy. Use of energy resources must generate economic prosperity, while transparency and non-discrimination have to be rooted in any transaction. Infrastructure development projects must follow strict environmental requirements, while promotion of low carbon technologies is a key to mitigating effects of climate change. An important milestone in this way is the Secretary General's report on the outcome of OSCE Expert Meeting on Energy Security, held in Vilnius in September 2010.

Protracted conflicts and conflict resolution have been a priority of several chairmanships. Every Chairperson-in-Office wants advance a solution to one of them. The conflicts in Georgia in 2008 and the 2010 crisis in Kyrgyzstan put the OSCE under the international spotlight and shaped perceptions of the Finnish, Greek and Kazakh chairmanships. In the Corfu dialogue many states have built a solid case for giving the Chair and the Conflict Prevention Centre more flexibility and early warning tools to avert a crisis or a conflict in their initial stages. The Chairperson-in-Office is expected to act quickly, consult key actors and mobilize political, financial and other available tools to address a conflict situation. It is the job of the Chairperson-in-Office to turn words into deeds as fine rhetoric is not sufficient on its own. It is evident that the protracted conflict in Transnistria will not be solved tomorrow. A work with partners will be done to resume formal 5+2 meetings. The proposal by the Chancellor Merkel and the President Medvedev is a sensible basis to work on. Confidence building process and real economic reintegration of the country should continue anyway. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, there are a lot of red lights flashing and the situation is worrisome. The Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group remain the engine that is driving a negotiated political settlement. The OSCE's role is the promotion of understanding and tolerance between the societies which are

parties to the conflict. OSCE should play more active role in the South Caucasus and especially in Georgia.

OSCE is a forum of 56, and Lithuania as the OSCE chairmanship should not have special preferences. On the other hand, all the Chairmanships bring a degree of distinctive experience, thinking and practice. Lithuania is a part of the Baltic Sea region and, like its Baltic neighbours, it shares the same values, has similar development ambitions and understands that only joint regional activities, for example, can help us develop common principles in the energy field. Stronger engagement in sub-regional cooperation is one of the priority directions for the Lithuanian chairmanship as sub-regional organisations play a significant role in the security of the OSCE region. Since 1999 the Platform for Co-operative Security adopted at the Istanbul Summit has not been used to its full potential. Fundamental institutional and regional developments in Europe over the last decade may be part of the reason for this. Yet, in the promotion of comprehensive security within the OSCE area all players – big or small – matter. Our belief in the potential of sub-regional organisations stems from the Baltic experience. Building on co-operative approaches the Council of the Baltic Sea States linked people and ideas, EU and non-EU members and transcended political agendas. It has been a huge success contributing to mutually reinforcing confidence, openness and trust. On a pan-European scale, a web of sub-regional organisations complementing each other's activities and those of the OSCE, could and will be able to push above its weight and contribute more effectively to building a strong security community.

We will encourage further bilateral or regional initiatives aimed at developing good neighbourly relations and inter-regional cooperation. More effective regional cooperation in the South Caucasus is vital for building long term stability in this volatile region. Central Asia could also take further joint efforts in responding to common challenges at the regional level. We are considering next year, under the aegis of the OSCE, of bringing to one table various regional and sub-regional organisations to discuss together the added value that they can bring to European security.

The Kazakh Chairmanship went an extra mile to strengthen the engagement between the OSCE and Afghanistan. The instability in Afghanistan affects us all. Threats emanating from Afghanistan – drugs, extremist ideology, terrorism – all undermine both the security of bordering states and of the OSCE region. Indeed, we are extremely concerned by the corrupting influence of drug trafficking on the development of societies in Central Asia and beyond. There are areas where the

OSCE holds the edge and can bring much-needed expertise and ideas to the table. These are border management, customs training, improved election processes through ODIHR assistance, providing assistance for defenders of human rights, improving legislation, advising on CBMs, gender education. The OSCE secretariat and field missions in Central Asia have developed excellent projects and more are in the pipeline.

Consolidation of all OSCE Afghanistan-related activities into one set of hands within the OSCE Secretariat might be considered. There is a need for stronger commitments regarding regional cooperation between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan. The OSCE can promote this process by “building bridges” – facilitating visa regimes, organising joint training as well as other measures. Agreements could be reached to develop more substantial OSCE-run projects to tackle drug trafficking and trade across borders or small scale economic projects for border communities. All this rests on the willingness of participating states to enhance OSCE engagement in Afghanistan.

Among the highlighted topics during our chairmanship will be promotion of tolerance and education. Lithuania has good experience in developing Holocaust research and education projects. We will focus on further development of tolerance education curriculum, improvement of school environment, strengthening the role of the civic society in tolerance education as well as on the exchange of experience on implementing educational projects aimed at promoting mutual respect and understanding, combating racism, and other forms of intolerance. This is a tool to enhance the integration of diversity into multi-cultural societies, both in the East and in the West.

World still faces various problems of national minorities' issues, as it is a matter of both national and international security. The reality of our days – the emergence of new minorities due to the migration processes. The quiet diplomacy and persistence of the High Commissioner on National Minorities Ambassador Knut Vollebaek bring good results in this sphere. Such important topics as hate crimes, racism, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination require continuous attention. ODIHR has done a very constructive work - organized a few events and roundtables urging the OSCE participating states to increase their efforts in fighting intolerance and discrimination as well as preventing hate crimes.

Freedom of the media is one of the essential pillars of the democracy. For the citizens of a democratic society it is extremely important to have access to information, to voice opinions and to exercise choice. Responsible media

professionals exercise high pluralistic standards and play a key role in taking a critical approach towards the governments and politicians by reporting corruption, human rights violations, minorities' concerns and manifestations of intolerance. Media pluralism is particularly crucial during periods of elections. Unfortunately, often journalists feel unsafe while performing this watchdog function - they are threatened, imprisoned, their lives are under risk.

We all agree that human rights and fundamental freedoms are at the core of security, so if freedom of expression is undermined or challenged, there is a serious threat to security. Governments have to do more to protect their journalists. Another important thing is the extremely rapid technological change of the media landscape. We have to ensure that the new media as well the freedom of expression and other fundamental human freedoms are properly guaranteed, especially for those who are the voice and conscience of our societies. With the freedom comes also the responsibility.

The chairmanship will be an excellent opportunity to assess how far European security has evolved and how much more still needs to be done to develop indivisibility of security throughout the OSCE area. It will be a difficult, hectic and inspiring time for our country, and our small chairmanship team. We have high hopes for building a reputation of Lithuanian diplomacy as transparent, effective and fair. We look forward to a challenging year ahead.