



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Ažubalis

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 13, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States warmly welcomes you, Foreign Minister Ažubalis, to the Permanent Council as the OSCE's 2011 Chairman-in-Office. We appreciate today's presentation of Lithuania's priorities and commend your personal commitment to the OSCE. We are certain you will lead a strong and successful Chairmanship, and look forward to working with you to make it so.

The challenges facing the OSCE and the international community now are not always as striking as the events of 1991 that you experienced, and that I also remember vividly, but they are as real. We must work now, as we did then, with a determination to build our common security on the basis of our OSCE principles and commitments, as we resolved to do in Astana. We look forward to working with you and our partners, Mr. Minister, to build on the Astana Commemorative Declaration as we strive for a region free of dividing lines, where the use of force is unthinkable, human rights and fundamental freedoms are fully respected, and economic and environmental cooperation is the norm.

The United States has long made clear that the OSCE's work in the human dimension is a priority – one where the full implementation of commitments must be taken most seriously. In the past several years, however, human rights and fundamental freedoms have increasingly come under attack. For our common good, we hold one another to account for our commitments in these areas, as we will do more specifically later in this meeting and in the coming weeks. There are a number of disturbing trends that indicate steps backwards in the OSCE region on many of the very principles we reaffirmed in Astana, just in December. We cannot ignore when journalists face threats and harassment, and the space for independent, pluralistic media is narrowed, or when elections are less than fully transparent and fail to reflect the will of the people. We are concerned when judiciaries too frequently serve as tools of the few, rather than as independent institutions safeguarding the rule of law. We also are concerned when fundamental freedoms of assembly, association, expression, and religion are all too often denied. And too many members of minority communities – including the Roma, Muslims, Jews, and LGBT individuals – face discrimination or live in conditions unacceptable in modern societies.

For these reasons, Mr. Minister, the United States strongly supports Lithuania's intent to make the human dimension a priority. We particularly welcome your emphasis on advancing freedom of the media and of expression, especially where new media and digital technologies are concerned. We also applaud your recognition of the importance of independent human rights institutions for democracy building, and we encourage a focus on ensuring civil society can operate freely throughout the OSCE region. In order to guarantee true security in our area, it is essential that we acknowledge and rectify serious shortcomings in implementing our commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As you note, Mr. Minister, the protracted conflicts continue to present challenges to our common security. We welcome Lithuania's intent to build on the OSCE's past contributions and look for new ways to boost confidence, particularly in Georgia and Moldova. We should continue to work toward our long-term aim of restoring a meaningful OSCE presence in Georgia, while seeking creative ways to achieve concrete improvements in the security and humanitarian situation on the ground. We should also continue to pursue our goal of resuming formal 5+2 negotiations on the status of Transnistria, while working to agree on steps to promote the free movement of goods and people and measures to reduce political-military tensions. Additionally, we should continue to advance our efforts to peacefully settle the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, under the auspices of the Minsk Group.

Key in the year ahead will be a greater capacity for the OSCE to respond to crises and to prevent conflicts from erupting or reigniting. In our Corfu Process discussions, we proposed empowering the Chairmanship to deploy small teams to crisis areas for a predetermined period to provide rapid humanitarian relief, greater transparency, and impartial monitoring. We believe such a capability could be developed and used to deal effectively with crises in all three dimensions, such as in the case of a serious energy or environmental disruption or egregious human rights violations.

Also key in the coming year will be our efforts to strengthen conventional arms control and confidence- and security-building measures. We share Lithuania's determination to materially improve military transparency in Europe by updating the 1999 Vienna Document.

Strengthening our common security necessarily involves not only efforts to resolve outstanding conflicts and enhance conventional arms control, but also to counter new and unconventional transnational threats and challenges. These include terrorism and violent extremism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, cyber attacks, organized crime, and illicit trafficking in weapons, drugs, and people. Responding to these threats – and bolstering stability in states such as Afghanistan that border the OSCE region – requires new means of collaboration. We therefore welcome Lithuania's emphasis on strengthening our efforts to counter transnational threats and on using the OSCE as a forum for regional cooperation.

In the economic and environmental dimension, we fully support Lithuania's intent to focus on energy security. With sustained attention and continued engagement, we have a chance to achieve real progress this year on efforts to prevent or mitigate energy-related crises. We can also make progress on promoting good governance and encouraging licit trade, and we encourage work in these areas.

In all of this, continued dialogue will be indispensable. We look forward to working with our partners to build on our discussions in the run-up to and during our summit in Astana last December and to take concrete action in the months ahead. With sufficient political will, we can deliver on the promise of the OSCE's principles and commitments, build trust and confidence, and ensure lasting security.

Mr. Minister, we wish you and your team the greatest of success in the months ahead. The United States will do everything it can to support Lithuania's Chairmanship.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.