



PRESIDENT OF LITHUANIA

Cherishing the vision of a Europe “whole and free”: Adamkus

The dichotomy of “east of Vienna” and “west of Vienna” holds no meaning for his country, Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus told the Permanent Council on 8 March during a three-day working visit to the Austrian capital. A common body of commitments — a “compass” guiding the behaviour of participating States — is at the core of the OSCE, he said, urging that more be done to create conditions that would erase dividing lines, “both on the ground and in our minds”. Excerpts from the President’s address follow.

President Valdas Adamkus, accompanied by Lithuanian Ambassador Rytis Paulauskas, is welcomed to the Hofburg Congress Centre by Spanish Ambassador Carlos Sánchez de Boado.
Photo: Džoja Gunda Barysaitė/Office of the President of Lithuania

There is an idea that I cherish deeply, and I believe we all do. That is the idea of building a “Europe whole and free” and a Europe that is at peace with itself. I have always held this idea dear to my heart and it is one that makes the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe unique.

Founded on the vision of inclusiveness and working together to build our continent whole and free, the OSCE area stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok, reaching from the Caspian to the Baltic, from Canada to Central Asia.

We have come a long way from the difficult days of Helsinki 1975. Europe has been set on a clear course, walls of mistrust have been brought down, families have been reunited and wars have been extinguished. Foreign troops have been withdrawn from a number of States, including Lithuania.

The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe played a crucial role in catalyzing democratic transformations. The Helsinki groups that emerged in many places heralded the determination to live in a democratic society and the hope that this goal was within reach.

The Charter of Paris of 1990 set forth a vision for a New Greater Europe, starting from the premise that “Europe whole and free is calling for a new beginning”. We have come a long way since Paris. However, our task is not finished and our vision is not complete.

CAUSE FOR PRIDE

A common body of commitments lies at the core of the OSCE. These commitments are designed to act as a compass guiding our behaviour. They are a cause for pride, but also remind us of our responsibility to live up to the aspirations to which we have all subscribed.

For my country, the OSCE means “us”, not “us and them”. The dichotomy of “east of Vienna” and “west of Vienna” has no meaning for us.

While much has been done to unite the OSCE area and to overcome the dividing lines

of the past, we should recognize that there remain regions characterized by tensions and lack of dialogue. As long as conflicts remain unsettled in the South Caucasus and Moldova and tensions continue in parts of south-eastern Europe, we have work to do. Our joint responsibility here is to build confidence by challenging the disagreements and to ensure the security, territorial integrity and sovereignty of participating States.

REJOINING EUROPE

The idea on which the OSCE is founded is dear to all the people of Lithuania. For many years, the OSCE has been our guide to democratic goals and values and it has always inspired us to action. After having lived in imposed isolation, Lithuania has rightfully rejoined the family of Europe as a full member of the OSCE, the EU and NATO. The OSCE's values and commitments and the OSCE institutions helped guide us through this process. For this, the Lithuanian people are ever grateful. And because of this, we wish to contribute more.

It is this feeling of commitment that motivates us to offer our candidacy for the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010. For its Chairmanship, Lithuania offers continuity and active engagement in promoting the implementation of OSCE commitments, encouraging regional co-operation and countering old and new threats to security and stability.

I wish to draw your attention to the following particular points of interest to my country:

The global challenges of the twenty-first century are the OSCE's core business. Countering the threat of terrorism and organized crime, fighting discrimination and promoting tolerance, addressing the pressing issues of energy security, environmental protection and migration, and promoting freedom of movement are and will continue to be a significant part of the Organization's agenda.

The OSCE has already developed a substantive role, through the Secretariat, in assisting participating States to reform their police agencies and move towards new and modern forms of policing. We support this strongly and recognize that we can perhaps do much more, particularly in considering the role of possible policing operations in zones of protracted conflict.

However, we have not yet come to the point where we can say that the OSCE's or any other regional organization's efforts alone are sufficient. Thus, we are very enthusiastic about the European Union's decision to reach out towards the States in Central Asia and sincerely hope that this move will be welcomed.

Indeed, we have to do more to enable us to understand each other better by fostering people-to-people contacts and encouraging business relations and tourism, not least with a view to discovering the richness of the cultural heritage of Central Asia and the new opportunities its countries offer.

VILNIUS PROCESS

One of the most important lessons from the Lithuanian experience of the past 15 to 16 years has been the importance of good neighbourly relations and building a region connected by strong co-operative ties at all levels. As a result, today, the Baltic Sea region can be proud of its active regional institutions, people-to-people contacts and trade, and even its common regional agenda. I am proud of the fact that a series of high-level meetings and conferences known as the "Vilnius Process" has greatly contributed to the success of this outreach effort.

We believe that the OSCE should help advance subregional co-operation where regional identity hardly exists and where countries are still struggling to find common ground for dialogue.

For us, the concept of regional co-operation and the good neighbourhood policy have been instrumental in resolving many difficult issues. A mutually acceptable agreement with Russia on passenger transit to and from the Kaliningrad region is just one example, but a telling one. Indeed, it is through such practical and pragmatic measures that we can build a united OSCE area for States, societies and individuals.

I am certain that we can all do more in creating the right conditions to erase the dividing lines and remove the hurdles that still exist among us, both on the ground and in our minds.

We should not shy away from difficulties, but should draw confidence from our shared past and the challenges that we have already overcome through our common resolve. Working together, in harmony and with a shared sense of responsibility, we can come considerably closer to achieving the vision of a "Europe whole and free" that brought us together in the first place.

A Lithuanian patriot

Valdas Adamkus was elected President of Lithuania in 2004 for a five-year term, having served in the same position from 1998 to early 2003. Born in Kaunas, he fled to Germany from Soviet occupation with his parents when he was 18. After studying at the Faculty of Natural Sciences at Munich University, he moved to the United States in 1949, where he worked in an automobile parts factory and later as a draughtsman. A graduate in civil engineering from the Illinois Institute of Technology, he joined the newly created U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, moving up to regional administrator in a career spanning three decades. Valdas Adamkus was active in the public and political life of the Lithuanian expatriate community. He traveled to Lithuania frequently after visiting for the first time in 1972. He and his wife, also from Lithuania, came home to stay in 1997. An avid sportsman, he won two gold and two silver medals in track-and-field events at the Olympic Games of the Enslaved Nations of 1948.



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