

Working toward stability, step by step

OSCE Chairperson, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Ažubalis

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When OSCE heads of state and government met last December in Astana, they recommitted themselves to a common vision of a “free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community” stretching across the OSCE area. In order to make this vision a reality, they agreed that “increased efforts should be made to resolve existing conflicts in the OSCE area in a peaceful and negotiated manner.” The resolution of the so-called “protracted conflicts” ranks among the very highest priorities of the Lithuanian Chairmanship. Simply put, the Transdniestrian conflict, like other such disputes in the OSCE area, has gone unresolved for too long.

At the same time, we recognize that breakthroughs will not happen overnight, and that there is no alternative to determined, patient engagement. Small steps are important – the key is to ensure that they are moving in the right direction.

Last year, we saw several small but important steps in the Transdniestrian conflict settlement process. People can again travel from Chisinau to Odessa via Tiraspol by train. Moldovan farmers can trust that they will be able to continue working their land on the left bank of the Dniestr/Nistru River. And political leaders, including Moldovan Prime Minister Vlad Filat and Transdniestrian leader Igor Smirnov, have grown accustomed to meeting on the sidelines of football matches. These developments all mark welcome steps toward normality.

But the journey to genuine peace and stability is indeed long, and we need to keep moving forward. Each step, however small, brings the reality of a stable and secure environment – and the ambitious vision of Astana – closer.

This is why I, in my role as the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, will lobby for the resumption of official negotiations in the “5+2” format when I meet top officials from both banks of the Dniestr/Nistru River during a visit to Moldova in coming days. These talks will not be a magic bullet, but they can advance our efforts to approach that ultimate goal, step by step. Long and tough as the negotiations will be, they are the only option.

Before the Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship ends on December 31st, I look forward to seeing concrete results from the expert groups that will address the day-to-day problems facing the people of the region. The groups' starting to meet again was a welcome step – delivering results will be the next.

Another useful step in the right direction would be the resumption of landline telephone services across the river. Before I hand over the duties of the OSCE Chairmanship to my Irish successor, I hope that people on both sides of the Dniestr/Nistru River will be able to call each other directly on landlines, as is standard in most parts of the world. The artificial interruption of telephone services across the river has lasted too long.

Let me point out that at the very beginning of our Chairmanship, we organized a study tour for students from universities of both banks of Dniestr/Nistru River to Vienna. The students had a chance to meet key OSCE personalities and observe the first Permanent Council

session under the Lithuanian chairmanship. This was yet another step marking the rapprochement between the societies of the two banks.

I very much appreciate the work conducted by the OSCE Mission to Moldova to promote confidence and mutual trust. Be it by holding seminars, roundtable meetings and conferences for military, law enforcement and emergency services personnel from both sides, or bringing together children from both river banks at summer camps, the Mission advances the OSCE goal of creating a secure region for all.