



## **In Freedom We Believe**

*Address by the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, Lithuanian Foreign Minister H.E. Audronius Ažubalis,  
at the special meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council*

*Vienna, 13 January 2011*

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to address the Permanent Council as Chairperson-in-Office as I meet with you for the first time since reconfirming our OSCE commitments in the Commemorative Declaration at Astana.

It is appropriate that we reconfirm, recommit and commemorate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Exactly twenty years ago today, January 13, 1991, the people of Lithuania took a stand.

On that day, as the chief spokesman for the then head of state, I watched the situation from the vantage point within the Parliament. There were many Russian, Ukrainian and western European journalists as well as many from our now partner country Japan with us that day. That was the day when everyone, politicians and average citizens, joined together as one. In this dangerous moment we were united because we had to defend common values: Freedom to create, to think, to move. Freedom to express ourselves, to make our own decisions over our lives and security.

It was no accident that Soviet tanks targeted the TV tower and all institutions of the media. The attack was intended to suppress free speech and communication. Our friends and families made great human sacrifices on that day to defend our freedoms and rights, only a short time after the adoption of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe.

Our courage was met with solidarity across the OSCE area. Lithuania was backed by peaceful rallies in Kyiv, Warsaw, Moscow, Washington, by civil society and governments

of most OSCE participating States. In time, with OSCE support, foreign troops withdrew, and we were left to choose our own, peaceful, secure path to freedom.

Back then -- in 1991 – all of us were challenged. And we – all of us --acted together to bring about a change from the Cold War Europe toward a Europe whole, free and at peace with itself.

Dear Colleagues, may I ask you to join me in a minute of silence to honour those who lost their lives on 13 January 1991 in Vilnius?

Over the past twenty years the OSCE participating States have made great progress individually and collectively. Our field missions did their part, our Institutions did their part. Twenty years later -- today – problems remain, and we still face challenges, but progress is undeniable. And again, through the Corfu Process and in Astana, we have re-committed ourselves.

Now Lithuania, a determined democracy of some three and a half million people, has been entrusted with the challenging responsibility of chairing the OSCE.

Lithuania accepts the honor of following and carrying forward the considerable work of my predecessor, Kazakh Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Saudabayev.

We know the obstacles that still lie in our path. Conflicts being addressed at the Geneva discussions, in the OSCE Minsk conference and “5+2” negotiations remain unresolved. We must resolve to meet these challenges, not shy away from them.

Also In 1991 South East Europe was torn by violent conflict. We, together with the EU, NATO and the UN responded. Through persistent, dedicated work by our Field Operations and Institutions, the OSCE has, over these past 20 years, helped bring Security and Cooperation back to this region.

What we did then, we must be able to do now in the remaining unresolved disputes. But, unless we all act on the recommendations made at Astana, and in the spirit of the Helsinki process, progress toward lasting peace cannot be made. This is not just a matter for the Chairmanship. It is a matter for us all. Resolving existing conflicts in the OSCE area in a peaceful and negotiated manner must be our highest commitment,-- our highest joint commitment.

We will not attempt to reinvent the wheel. We will continue the good work of previous Chairmanships. We will encourage parties to work within agreed formats, fully respecting international law and OSCE commitments. As always we will work with the UN and EU to seek to prevent and manage crises should they develop.

Our approach will be to encourage openness and transparency to build trust and confidence, and reduce tensions. We will build concretely upon the basic commitments of Helsinki, Paris, Istanbul and now Astana. The OSCE will be judged by its actions, not just its declarations.

We will push for a resumption of formal “5+2” negotiations on Moldova with a solid agenda.

On conflict in Georgia, we will use the Geneva process to rebuild trust and will work to restore a meaningful OSCE presence in Georgia.

We will support greater engagement by the Minsk Group to re-energize the political negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Some of the greatest threats to our individual and collective security are trans-national challenges to cyber-security, and the trafficking of people, weapons, and drugs. We must coordinate with other organizations to fight and defeat them. We must also seek through border management projects with Afghanistan to achieve the same ends.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Lithuania as the Chair is well-placed to build consensus. What once was a historic dividing line between Eastern and Western Europe is now a promising unifying point. As OSCE Chairman, we will draw upon our own unique experience in regional cooperation, such as our recent leadership of the Council of Baltic Sea States.

This is particularly relevant in the OSCE’s economic and environmental dimension, and also in the promotion of freedom of movement. To take one concrete example, we have worked to find a mutually acceptable agreement with Russia on passenger transit to and from the Kaliningrad region. Our OSCE security community should be open as well as secure just as this agreement is open and secure.

In the OSCE, security has always been measured in terms of the inherent dignity of the individual. Our community is safest when human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are upheld. When those rights and freedoms are violated, we are all at risk.

I am personally committed to supporting and defending the freedom of the media, safety of journalists, and protecting independent national human rights institutions.

Working with the Representative of the Freedom of the Media I will call an OSCE conference on the safety of journalist in Vilnius in June. The importance of such a conference is made clear when you realize that over the past 12 years more than 1,100 journalists and media staff have been killed worldwide while pursuing their legitimate and invaluable profession. This cannot continue. We must also pay more attention to

the impact of new technologies on the spread of information. These individuals, institutions and technologies give voice to the people and society. They are the protectors of our freedoms.

Freedom to express ourselves is found not just in words, but in actions. In this regard we should look again at our individual electoral processes. We must guarantee free assembly, and equal and free access to the media. We must ensure the freedom to speak out without fear of injury, imprisonment or even death.

As Chairman-in-Office I am strongly committed to protect the Copenhagen principles on elections process. I will support the work of ODIHR in preserving them. As a member of our particular neighborhood I deeply regret that those principles have not been met in the recent election in Belarus and that Belarus has withdrawn consensus for the continuation of the OSCE office in Minsk. I call for a reconsideration of this decision as well as for fulfillment of the Copenhagen standards.

I look forward to working with our Partners, both inside Europe and beyond, who have regularly supported our work, thoughtfully and generously, in the spirit of global cooperation.

We must also involve Parliamentarians more actively in our work. Having led the delegation of the Lithuanian Seimas to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for several years, I am well aware of the potential of this body, and will continue to advocate robust inter parliamentary dialogue.

As in all matters involving human rights we will coordinate closely with our good partners in the Council of Europe, and support ODIHR in its work with NGOs and civil society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Lithuania is under no illusions about the enormity of the tasks that face us this year. As the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office I count on your cooperation in building on the proposals that have been made during the Corfu Process and in the preparation of the Astana Summit, including the drafting of a Framework for Action.

By the time we meet in Vilnius for the OSCE Ministerial on 6-7 December, I believe we shall:

- register tangible progress in addressing protracted conflicts;
- significantly improve our record of implementation of media freedom commitments;
- enhance the OSCE profile with regard to transnational threats, including those emanating from the territory of Afghanistan;

- define the OSCE's role in our energy security dialogue, and
- promote tolerance education throughout the OSCE area in order to combat hate crimes and discrimination.

These and other priority objectives are presented in more detail in the 2011 Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship Work Programme that has been circulated along with the text of my remarks.

I look forward to working on this substantial agenda with my Troika partners (Ireland and Kazakhstan), and with the Secretary General, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, whose term is to expire this summer after many years of superb direction and dedicated leadership. But I promise you, that as Chairperson-in-Office, I will work closely with all to find a new Secretary General worthy to follow in Marc's footsteps.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have a full agenda ahead of us this year. At the same time, the global financial situation obliges us to do more with less. Therefore we must play to our strengths. We must be pragmatic and constructive. We must move forward one step at a time in issues and regions where we can make a difference.

I look forward to working with you, and wish us all a successful year, culminating in the fruitful Ministerial meeting in Vilnius.