

**Statement prepared for delivery at the Closing Session of
the 18th meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council
by Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania Andrius Kubilius
7 December 2011, Vilnius**

Distributed in writing only

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ministers, Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first of all thank you for coming to Vilnius for the closing event of the Lithuanian chairmanship of the OSCE. Back in early 1990s, the OSCE proved to be a very important organization to Lithuania and other nations, who struggled for their right to return to Europe. It is remarkable how OSCE has retained its importance over the last 20 years.

When we started our chairmanship this January, we said: in a format as diverse as the OCSE, progress will be achieved only by cooperation and hard work. Each step, no matter how small it might appear to be, is very important.

The positive way we have traveled together this year has covered the following achievements:

- we have enabled the resumption of negotiations in the 5+2 format on Transnistria and continued discussions in the Geneva International Discussions;
- we have advanced the cause of media freedom, including measures for ensuring freedom of expression on the internet and encouraging action to protect the safety of journalists;
- we have improved border monitoring and regional cooperation;
- we have improved regional dialogue on transport and energy and cyber security;
- we have improved the dialogue among the OSCE and OSCE Partner Countries;
- we have actively sponsored programs combatting religious intolerance and discrimination, especially involving hate speech and hate crime in public discourse.

We believe that working hand-in-hand with the participating States, Lithuania has managed to advance the whole OSCE process and stimulate positive developments in the OSCE area.

Of course, there are issues that remain of great concern:

- First, people in many countries are still deprived of their basic civil rights. With this view in mind, we have organized a side event for civil society and NGO representatives, who have produced a list of valuable policy recommendations. I commend the work of

Civil Society activists and human rights defenders and expect that we will continue to build on their recommendations.

- Second, the problem is that journalists still are not able to carry out their work without threats to their security. Indeed, as was reported at another side event of this conference, violence against journalists has been growing in the OSCE area in general, and in certain parts of the region in particular.
- Finally, there are still countries where elections are far from being fair and free. Those countries are very close to our borders. This fact obliges us to work more insistently to have situation improved.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A pragmatic, constructive and even-handed approach was our departure point during both our recent Chairmanship of the Community of Democracies and the current OSCE Chairmanship. We will also adhere to it during our EU presidency in 2013, when OSCE will be celebrating its 40th anniversary.

I have no doubt that the incoming Chairman-in-Office, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ireland, will continue the same path, seeking to consolidate and advance the principles for which this distinguished organization has been standing already for four decades. Good luck.

Thank you.