

Lithuania to chair OSCE in 2011

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VILNIUS - Lithuania was awarded the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2011 under a decision taken at the organization's 15th Ministerial Council in Madrid on Nov. 30.

Lithuania will be the first Baltic nation to take up the rotating chairmanship, which is currently held by Spain. Finland, Greece and Kazakhstan will fulfill the role in 2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively.

Lithuania's activity in the OSCE is significant to countering terrorism, regulating frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia, and promoting democracy and free elections throughout Europe, Minister of Foreign Affairs Petras Vaitiekunas said in a statement in Madrid.

"Protracted conflicts that continue to have a negative impact on security, stability and development shall remain a major target of the OSCE's work. The OSCE and its executive structures must be encouraged to employ all necessary resources, energy and creativity with a view to finding peaceful and lasting resolution to all of them," read the statement.

The foreign minister also called upon all NATO countries to encourage Russia to reconsider its suspension of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty that was undertaken at the OSCE's Istanbul Summit in 1999.

In 2004, Lithuania announced its candidacy for Chairman in Office – as the title is called – for 2010, but negotiations were made to allow Kazakhstan to preside over the organization before the first Baltic state did so.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Zygimantas Pavilionis told The Baltic Times that Lithuania was effective in actively engaging Kazakhstan on internal reforms, pledging OSCE values and political attitudes, and operating in more westward-looking manner.

Algis Dabkus, Security Policy Director at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told The Baltic Times Lithuania is prepared to take on the responsibility of chairmanship.

He said the role will strengthen Lithuania's foreign policies, provide visibility in settling frozen conflicts in the South Caucasus, and serve as a training tool in the run-up to 2013, when the country will hold the EU presidency.

"The [EU] presidency demands a lot of knowledge of administrative and diplomatic issues. For such a relatively small country, we see the chairmanship as an exercise," Dabkus said.

In 2009, the Defense Ministry and Ministry of Foreign Affairs will develop a task force to plan and coordinate the priorities of the chairmanship and ensure that all necessary financial resources are made available in the national budget, said Dabkus.

The OSCE is the world's largest regional security organization uniting 56 countries in Europe, North America and Asia. The organization has missions in the Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The organization focuses on promotion of trust between states and nations, democratic reforms, establishment of modern institutions and civil society, as well as observation of elections.