

Report

Roundtable with the Lithuanian delegation

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**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,
ISLAMABAD**

Roundtable with the Lithuanian delegation

The ISSI hosted a Roundtable on 17th April 2014, welcoming a three member delegation from Lithuania. The delegation was led by His Excellency Mr. Kestutis Kudzmanas, Lithuania's nonresident Ambassador to Pakistan, based in Ankara Turkey. He was accompanied by Ms. Ina Marciulionyte, and Ms. Lina Skerstonaitė, who are respectively the Director of Latin America, Africa, Asia and Pacific Department, and Head of Latin America, Africa, Asia and Pacific Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Vilnius. The delegation was assisted by Mr. Masud Khan, Honorary Consul General of Lithuania to Pakistan.

The Chairman, Ambassador (Retd) Khalid Mahmood and the Director General, Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais led the team of researchers at the ISSI in conducting the Roundtable.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood inaugurated the Roundtable by welcoming the Lithuanian delegation. He noted that its presence in Islamabad marked the fourth round of consultations between the foreign policy establishments of the two countries. In his introductory remarks about Lithuania, the Chairman observed that the country had encountered several critical phases in its history, the most recent being its struggle for independence from the Soviet Union, which in September 1991 culminated in the formal recognition of statehood by the Soviet Union and the UN. Lithuania proceeded to join the EU, NATO and the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG). It has also held the Presidency of the Council of the EU. Pakistan established diplomatic ties with Lithuania soon after its emergence as an independent state; ties that have been consistently marked by mutual goodwill. Nonetheless, interaction between the two states remains limited; contact at ministerial level has been negligible while few agreements have attained fruition. Trade too remains disappointing despite facilitating measures such as the avoidance of double taxation and the protection of investment. The economies of the two states are complementary but their full potential is yet to be realised.

In the realm of foreign affairs, Lithuania's contribution to NATO presence in Afghanistan consists primarily of development assistance rather than of military support. Given the impending US drawdown, the Roundtable provided an opportunity to exchange views on Afghanistan's post-drawdown futures. Besides the Afghan issue, Pakistan and Lithuania can establish cooperation in a number of areas in view of the latter's membership of the NSG and its bid for UN reform including that of the Security Council.

Dr. Rais echoed the Chairman's welcome, noting that the Lithuanian delegation's visit to the ISSI provided an opportunity to open up dialogue between the two sides and enhance understanding of the respective challenges besetting each country. He explained that the ISSI is devoted to studying international politics, security, and geopolitical issues with special reference to Pakistan's regional coordinates within the broader context of national security. Regarding the confluence of regional/global developments, he noted how events in Europe and the West had reverberated in this part of the world from colonial times. The most recent example of this confluence was evinced in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that brought the Cold War directly to Pakistan's borders; the aftershocks of the conflict still present the country with daunting challenges, and threaten the region with prolonged instability. Whilst international attention prioritises events following September 11, only a historical perspective can yield a more comprehensive understanding of a conflict which has affected 60-70% of the Afghan population, and whose repercussions have been felt across the globe. With regards to the crisis in Ukraine, Pakistan remains deeply concerned about the evolving situation and is closely watching the responses of the EU, the US and Russia.

Roundtable with the Lithuanian delegation

Ms. Marciulionyte introduced the Honorary Consul General of Lithuania to Pakistan, Mr. Masud Khan and appreciated his efforts in advocating the appointment of a Lithuanian ambassador to Islamabad. She proceeded to deliver a visually engaging presentation that could be considered a primer on Lithuania covering geography, climate, language, culture, demography, architecture and history. She noted that the Baltic republic was an ancient land that held stone age relics and had been a part of various geopolitical configurations, notably the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Tsarist Russia. The current population of three million people speaks the Lithuanian language, often termed a 'living dinosaur' that belongs to the Indo-European group of languages and is thus distinct from the Slavic group. In contemporary history, Lithuania attained statehood in 1918, following World War I but swung between occupation, initially by Soviet forces and subsequently by the Nazis during World War II, only to be retaken by the Red Army and reincorporated into the Soviet Union following Germany's defeat. The Gorbachev era marked the rise of a movement for independence led by dissident Lithuanian intellectuals, which remains a prime example of peaceful resistance across the world.

Present day Lithuania is devoid of mineral resources, and in contrast provides a notable example of a knowledge economy rich in human capital. 40% of its population is university educated while 90% speak at least one foreign language. Its sectors of excellence include I.T, laser technology, biotechnology, telecommunications, and aerospace.

Factors explaining the lack of close ties between Pakistan and Lithuania include geography as well as the latter's recently attained independence from the Soviet Union, which prompted a Europe-centric economic and security focus. The relative lag in Pak-Lithuanian relations may be redressed via establishing distinct mechanisms of consultation that allow direct exchange of views from both sides thus countering the negative effects of media coverage. Various options exist for economic cooperation, notably construction of wooden houses, transportation, the spin-offs from the Chinese container train project, double tax avoidance, investment in aerospace industries, and more generally in science and technology.

The crisis in Ukraine was triggered by Ukraine's desire to sign the European Association Agreement. Russian responses stem from its undeclared intention to regain control of the Baltic states hence prompting Lithuania to request for a number of defensive measures including enhanced NATO air patrols. It is hoped that the meeting amongst representatives from the EU, US, Russia and Ukraine will result in a de-escalation of the crisis. While a new Cold War is to be avoided, it is vital to stress the sanctity of present day borders since Russian annexation of Crimea constitutes a dangerous precedent for other secessionist movements. Comparisons with Kosovo are misleading as the units comprising the former Yugoslavia were each invited to hold a referendum regarding independence.

Following the presentation, Dr. Rais initiated an interactive session amongst participants in which topics alluded to by the three speakers were deliberated in greater depth. The discussion ranged upon the following areas:

- Challenges of formulating an effective response to the Ukrainian crisis and the relative efficacy of various measures
- Implications of receding US global power for Crimea and Eastern Ukraine

Roundtable with the Lithuanian delegation

- Chances of Crimea triggering a domino effect in other volatile regions and the role of international law
- Prospects of bolstering Pak-Lithuanian trade and commerce
- Opportunities for boosting bilateral ties beyond the economic sphere
- Utility of talks with the Taliban
- Reform of the UN

The Chairman closed the proceedings by expressing his appreciation once again to the delegation. In return Ms. Ina Marciulionyte presented the Director General with gift books on Lithuania, which are to be placed in the ISSI library.

- Prepared by

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