

Reuters News

Brussels, 22 feb. 2010(Reuters) - A former Lithuanian foreign minister forced to resign this year after denying his country hosted a secret CIA prison was named the EU ambassador to Afghanistan on Monday. Diplomats said Vygaudas Usackas, 46, who has served as ambassador to Britain and United States, won approval of EU foreign ministers after his candidacy was proposed by the bloc's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton.

"I am 100 percent satisfied with this appointment ... and there is nothing I need to be in any way worried about," Ashton told a news briefing after a meeting with foreign ministers. Usackas was forced to resign as Lithuania's top diplomat this year after a dispute with the country's president over whether Lithuania had hosted a secret CIA prison for al Qaeda suspect in 2004-2005.

Usackas said an official investigation showed there were no such sites, while President Dalia Grybauskaite said it backed her view the jails existed. Local news media had alleged he may have helped to cover up the existence of the prisons, a claim he denied.

The European Parliament's author of a report on Afghanistan has called into question Usackas's fitness to serve as envoy.

"His reputation and independence could be compromised by media reports that he has been complicit in withholding the truth about CIA rendition activities in Lithuania," **Pino Arlacchi**, an Italian liberal, said in a recent statement.

Usackas will oversee the EU's security and development assistance in Afghanistan, where NATO forces are trying to combat Taliban insurgents.

The EU's involvement in Afghanistan will be a major test for Ashton, who was picked late last

year for the new beefed-up post of the EU's high representative for foreign policy, despite some criticism that she lacked experience.

Usackas will replace Ettore Francesco Sequi, the EU envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, who is to step down this month.