



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)**

Hearing on

**SLOVAKIA'S CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE OSCE:
PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES**

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

3:30 p.m.

Capitol Visitor Center

Room SVC 201-00

Opening Statement of Senator Roger Wicker

Thank you, Chairman Hastings. I join you in welcoming His Excellency Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák before the Helsinki Commission. I appreciate having the Foreign Minister's views and expertise as the Helsinki Commission works to formulate U.S. policy regarding the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Mr. Chairperson, welcome.

For more than 40 years, the OSCE has worked to bolster security, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. In April 2017, Senator Cardin and I – along with every other senator then serving on the Helsinki Commission – introduced a resolution urging President Trump to recognize the importance of the Helsinki Final Act and the OSCE as well as their relevance to American national security. Peace and prosperity in the OSCE region rests on respect for human rights and the preservation of fundamental freedoms, democratic principles, and economic liberty. At a time when civil society is under threat in so many countries, we look to you, as the Chair, to ensure that people's voices are heard in the OSCE.

Unfortunately, as a 57-member organization that operates by consensus, the OSCE is not without internal challenges. Russia has tried to use its vote to block consensus and the power of the purse, paralyzing the OSCE's mission. Russia has also attempted to redefine European borders through force. Countering the Russian Federation's clear, gross, and uncorrected violations of all 10 core OSCE principles should be among the highest priorities of any OSCE chairmanship.

Mr. Chairperson, we appreciate that you visited Ukraine in January and have underscored the importance of addressing the war there and its humanitarian consequences.

I also am heartened that someone with your deep expertise on the Balkans is engaged at this critical time. I had the opportunity in July to lead a nine-member, bicameral, bipartisan delegation to Bosnia and the Federal Republic of Srpska. Frankly, I remain deeply concerned about the region as a whole and would like to hear your views on how we might strengthen the process of democratic reform, the fight against corruption, and regional stability.

Finally, we are especially honored to have you here on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the founding of NATO and 15 years after Slovakia joined this essential transatlantic alliance. It was great to see Secretary Pompeo visiting Slovakia in February. As he said when he stood before Slovakia's Gate of Freedom Memorial -- remembering the more than 400 innocents who lost their lives attempting to flee communism -- he said we stand "in unity with the people of Slovakia in Europe in recommitting to a future that is more prosperous, secure, and most of all, free."

I wish you every success, and I look forward to your insights and counsel on how we can make a better world for future generations throughout the OSCE region. Thank you.