



# HELSINKI COMMISSION BRIEFING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

**Testimony :: Hon. Alcee L. Hastings**

**Chairman - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Good Afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, guests, and colleagues. Welcome to today's briefing on "Ingushetia: the New Hot Spot in the North Caucasus."

Although the Russian government appears to have prevailed militarily over the secessionist forces in Chechnya, sporadic violence still occurs there, and more ominously, this violence has spread to neighboring regions, especially Ingushetia, Chechnya's neighbor to its west. To be sure, former President Putin did take encouraging steps a few years ago when he removed from office some of the most incompetent local leaders in the North Caucasus region.

Nevertheless, there are troubling signs on the horizon. As was the case in Chechnya a few years ago, Ingushetia has become the venue for terrorist and counter-terrorist operations, illegal detentions, kidnappings and disappearances, as well as extra-judicial executions carried out by shadowy forces. Moreover, there are indications that Islamic extremists have been behind some of the attacks on local police and officials. Unlike Chechnya, Ingushetia has never attempted to secede from Russia, and the growing public discontent is aimed largely at Ingushetia's corrupt and repressive political leadership.

Meanwhile, to the east of Chechnya, Dagestan, an economically depressed and notoriously corrupt region, was shaken earlier this year by a spate of high-profile killings that was remarkable in an area already distinguished by violence and ethnic tensions. The situation in other North Caucasus republics is not encouraging.

It is certainly true that the North Caucasus today does not compare to some other parts of the world in terms of violence against the civilian population, and let us hope that it never will. Perhaps Russia's new President, Mr. Medvedev, and his advisors will undertake policies for the North Caucasus that are viable and just for all concerned. Nevertheless, the Helsinki Commission believes that it is time to focus some attention on this region of an OSCE participating state that is fraught with instability and the possibility of renewed conflict. We do this not necessarily to criticize but to hear the insights of people directly concerned with events there and perhaps suggest strategies for avoiding the tragedy of Chechnya.

Our guests today are particularly qualified to discuss the situation in the North Caucasus. Their biographies are available at the door, and as you can see, they have traveled a long way to share their experiences and their knowledge with us today.

We will open with a very brief film on the human tragedy that has taken place in the North Caucasus, and then move to presentations from our panel.

Following these presentations, I hope you will join me in asking a few questions.

Thank you and let us begin with Ms. Musaeva.