



**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 Representative Alcee L. Hastings

Chairman

Mr. Chairperson, Mr. Foreign Minister, I warmly welcome you to the United States Congress and thank you for giving us the opportunity to hear your views as the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

As you may know, this is the first hearing of the Helsinki Commission in the 116th Congress. I intend, as chairperson, to build and maintain active U.S. engagement in the OSCE, based on principled foreign policy, and a belief that we – and by “we,” I mean here the United States – must practice what we preach.

I will also continue the strong parliamentary diplomacy that has been a hallmark of this commission since it was created. Having previously served as the president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I know how important robust engagement from our legislative bodies is to the OSCE. To foster this exchange, you and others should expect a robust calendar of hearings like this one, chaired by myself and other Commissioners to explore all aspects of our partnership.

I commend my colleagues from the Helsinki Commission, including Co-Chairman Wicker, for their service in leadership roles in the assembly as well as your colleague, member of the Slovak Parliament Peter Osusky, who successfully headed the short-term election observation mission in Armenia last year. OSCE election observation is the gold standard, and we were happy to have OSCE observers here for our congressional elections last fall.

If I may, I will also take one more minute to commend another of your countrymen, President Andrej Kiska. President Kiska was honored recently by the German Council of Sinti and Roma for his leadership in countering anti-Roma racism. That is really a great honor for all of Slovakia. As you may know, the commission has long championed efforts to promote the security and equality of Roma and supported the development of OSCE efforts to address anti-Semitism, racism, and other forms of intolerance even towards Black Europeans. Efforts that embrace the entireties of our societies are critical to the future of the OSCE and hope that your country will continue its focus on these issues this year.

Mr. Minister, as you know, the Helsinki Commission's engagement with Slovakia dates to 1990, even before independence, and I was personally fortunate to have the opportunity to visit Slovakia in 2008. I congratulate Slovakia on the election of your new president, Zuzana Caputova on Saturday.

It is wonderful to see your country in this leadership role today. Chairing the 57-country OSCE is no easy task and we are grateful that Slovakia has taken up this challenge. As my colleagues, Senators Wicker and Cardin, wrote in the WOODROW WILSON QUARTERLY last fall, the OSCE's mission is as important as ever. I am very happy to be able to continue the Helsinki Commission's tradition of hosting a discussion with the country holding the OSCE chairmanship and I look forward to hearing your views on how we can best meet the challenges that we face together.

INTRODUCTION OF CHAIRPERSON MIROSLAV LAJČÁK

Mr. Chairperson, we have circulated your full biography so I will not repeat all of it here but I would like to note a few things in particular.

Miroslav Lajčák is a career diplomat with a distinguished career serving both his country and the international community. In addition to representing Slovakia in numerous positions, he served as High Representative of the International Community and Special Representative of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was a key figure in the mediation of the post-conflict crises in the western Balkans and negotiated, organized and supervised the referendum on the independence of Montenegro. Most recently, he served as president of the United Nations General Assembly where he advocated for dialogue, strengthening multilateralism, and serving the needs of all people.