



**Statement by the Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin
Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Hearing on “Advancing U.S. Interests in the OSCE Region”
October 28, 2009**

Today’s hearing provides a unique opportunity to assess the strengths and shortcomings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as a vehicle for advancing U.S. interests in the expansive OSCE region and beyond. We meet as preparations are getting underway for the Athens Ministerial Meeting, scheduled for early December, capping off the Greek OSCE chairmanship. Next year will mark the 35th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, an historic document providing a comprehensive framework for advancing security in all its aspects through the military security, economic and human dimensions.

In his Berlin speech as candidate, President Obama emphasized that we are heirs to a struggle for freedom – a struggle in which freedom eventually prevailed in bringing down the walls of a divided city, country and continent. He spoke of the importance of strong institutions as vehicles for promoting cooperation. The two decades that have followed have witnessed stunning successes as well as serious setbacks. Throughout, the principles reflected in the Final Act have withstood the test of time and proven their enduring value as we seek to address lingering and new challenges.

A survey of developments in the OSCE is a reminder of the scale of work that remains: from simmering tensions throughout the Caucasus region and so-called frozen conflicts elsewhere to continual concerns in the Balkans and the impasse with Moscow over the CFE treaty. The recently concluded Human Dimension Implementation Meeting highlighted troubling trends in the human dimension: from adoption of restrictive laws aimed at reigning in freedom of religion and other fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and media, to the plight of national minorities and Roma as well as other manifestations of discrimination and intolerance, particularly anti-Semitism.

Indeed, these and many other issues confronting the participating States today are multidimensional in nature whether we are talking about combating corruption or trafficking in human beings. As such, the OSCE is uniquely positioned to contribute to efforts to address that and other common challenges.

But addressing today's challenges requires that we fundamentally assess why the comprehensive security to which the OSCE aspires to, and where many early successes were achieved, remains an elusive goal today. Why are so many of the OSCE participating States backsliding on their commitments across the three dimensions? Why are key principles such as respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States being violated; and why, in spite of years of efforts, have we not been able to resolve the protracted conflicts? Is the OSCE effectively examining these questions through the ongoing Corfu Process?

I welcome this opportunity to hear from our Administration witnesses on how, together, we can make better use of OSCE as vehicle for advancing our country's interests in the OSCE region and beyond.