



## **Statement by Senator Benjamin L. Cardin**

**Chairman**

**Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

**Hearing on**

### **“Holocaust Era Assets – After the Prague Conference”**

*May 25, 2010*

Twenty years ago, the establishment of democratically elected governments in many Central and East European countries sparked new hope that people in this region would be able to address – and redress – wrongs committed decades ago. More broadly, it was a time of energy and engagement on a host of unfinished business.

As the Helsinki Commission began to examine some of these issues, we convened our first hearing on property claims issues in 1996 – and Ambassador Eizenstat was our first witness. Unfortunately, it has now been close to 15 years since that event, and our work is still not done.

In the intervening years, there have been many hearings and briefings. There have been countless letters to and meetings with foreign officials, and numerous resolutions in this Congress as well as in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. And still, our work is not done.

I was therefore heartened when the Czech Government agreed to host a conference to examine outstanding issues relating to Holocaust-era assets. I introduced a resolution in the Senate (S. Con. Res. 23), specifically commanding the Czech Government and supporting the goals of the Prague Conference. Separately, I cosponsored Sen. Nelson's resolution on the specific problem of restitution of or compensation for property seized Nazi and Communist eras (S. Res. 153).

I do want to take a minute to express concern about two countries that were mentioned by name in the Senate resolution.

First, it was noted that successive governments in Poland have promised to adopt an effective general property compensation law, but no government has yet to do so.

I understand that this is a particularly complex problem in Poland. Poland probably had greater border changes and more population transfers or expulsions at the end of the war than any other country in the region. And the confiscations carried out during the Nazi occupation were compounded by confiscations undertaken by the Polish communist regime.

In other words, addressing this issue in Poland may be especially challenging – but I do not believe it is impossible. Indeed, the adoption of a limited property compensation law in 2005, for Poles who were originally from territory beyond the Bug River, was a useful start to addressing private property claims - but it should not be the end. Every major political party in Poland has supported draft legislation on property compensation and I hope that the Prime Minister will be able to carry through on his stated commitment to see a general property law adopted.

Second, the resolution we introduced last year also drew attention to the situation in Lithuania. Unfortunately, Lithuania's 1995 law on the return of property to religious associations is needlessly restrictive. I hope the government of Lithuania will fulfill promises it has made to revisit this legal framework and ensure that communal property -- not limited to houses of worship only, but also including, for example, schools -- is returned.

I am honored to have testifying before us today Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat. His full biography is available, but I want to note he is singularly qualified to address the subject of our hearing.

Ambassador Eizenstat is our former U.S. Ambassador to the European Union. In the 1990s, he led the negotiations for the United States with the Swiss, German, Austrian, and French private sectors and their governments on Holocaust-era bank accounts, slave and forced labor, unpaid insurance policies, immovable property, and the restitution of or compensation for stolen communal and private property. Last year, he led the U.S. delegation to the Prague Conference, and he has just returned from follow up discussion in the Czech capital.

As Lord Janner said of him at the Conference in Prague last year, Stuart Eizenstat has “labored through endless complexities to secure tangible results.” Ambassador Eizenstat, thank you for joining us.