

Statement of the Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin, Co-Chairman  
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe  
hearing on  
“Finland’s Leadership of the OSCE”

February 13, 2008

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate this opportunity to engage with the Foreign Minister in his capacity as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE for 2008. Indeed, Finland has provided important leadership in the Helsinki Process, predating the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. It is good to have a steady hand at the helm, especially as the OSCE faces potentially rough waters ahead during this year and beyond.

My personal involvement with OSCE dates back to the struggle of Soviet Jewry in the dark days of the U.S.S.R. This year marks 15 years of service on this Commission and it was in Helsinki that same year that I began my active involvement in the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. These years have witnessed the lows of a genocidal war in Bosnia, bloody conflict in Chechnya, and repression in Kosovo. But we have also seen promising signs, with popular revolts in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine. The work of the OSCE, in all of its dimensions, is far from over with much to be done to bring healing from the legacy of past and lingering conflicts to helping those seeking to consolidate democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

The Helsinki Commission continues to play a unique role in the Helsinki Process. One such example concerns the spike of anti-Semitic violence that broke out in numerous participating States earlier this decade. In a bipartisan effort, Commissioners responded, making use of the OSCE PA and other avenues to elevate attention within the OSCE to the distinctive threat posed by anti-Semitism and related violence. We appreciate your prompt reappointment of the three personal representatives on tolerance, including one with a portfolio specifically covering anti-Semitism. I also note your plans to host an expert meeting on hate crimes this year.

In recent weeks we have convened a series of hearings to assess the ongoing work of the OSCE in this regard and have heard from experts, including Professor Weisskirchen. These sessions have confirmed the importance of maintaining a distinct focus on anti-Semitism, and resisting attempts by some to reduce the attention under some kinds of generic tolerance rubric. It has also become clear that the personal representatives need some form of meaningful support mechanism. Perhaps some arrangement could be put in place by the troika of past, present, and future OSCE chairs, to ensure continuity.

Mr. Minister, over the years the United States has played an important leadership role in promoting the core principles enshrined in the Final Act. Effective leadership, however, requires that America lead by example when it comes to implementation of commitments, participation in meetings at all levels, and matching our desire for the OSCE to play a robust role with the necessary resources.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.