



# HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

## Testimony :: Statement of Honorable Steny H. Hoyer

Ranking member - Helsinki Commission

Statement of Representative Steny H. Hoyer

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Hearing on

"Belarus - Stalled at the Crossroads"

March 9, 2000

MR. CHAIRMAN, I BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE COMMISSION, THE CONGRESS AND OUR GOVERNMENT CONTINUE TO SHINE THE LIGHT ON WHAT IS GOING ON IN BELARUS. I THANK YOU FOR HOLDING THIS TIMELY HEARING TO DO JUST THAT, AND I WELCOME OUR MANY DISTINGUISHED WITNESSES WHO WILL SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES IN FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN BELARUS. SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, THE STATE DEPARTMENT RELEASED ITS ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS COUNTRY REPORT ON BELARUS WHICH HIGHLIGHTS NUMEROUS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND UNDERSCORES THE BELARUSIAN GOVERNMENT'S LACK OF COMPLIANCE WITH ITS OSCE COMMITMENTS. AMONG OTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DETERIORATING POLITICAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS ARE THE CONTINUING SHOW TRIAL OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER MIKHAIL CHYGIR (Che-GEER), THE CONTINUED DETENTION AND BRUTAL BEATING BY PRISON GUARDS IN DECEMBER OF POLITICAL DETAINEE ANDREI KLYMOV (KLEE-mof), A DEPUTY OF THE 13TH SUPREME SOVIET, AND THE STILL UNRESOLVED DISAPPEARANCES OF OPPOSITION LEADERS VIKTOR GONCHAR (GON-char) AND YURI ZAKHARENKA (Zah-CAR-ehn-kah).

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR, I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET WITH ALL OF OUR BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADERS PRESENT HERE TODAY - MR. SHARETSKIY (Sha-RETS-key), MR. SHUSHKEVYCH (Shoosh-KAY-vich) AND MR. LEBEDKO. ALL OF THEM ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE STRUGGLE TO RESTORE DEMOCRACY TO BELARUS. THE 13TH SUPREME SOVIET, WHICH THEY REPRESENT, WAS ILLEGALLY DISBANDED BY BELARUSIAN STRONGMAN LUKASHENKO. IN THE OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, WE HAVE WORKED TO KEEP FAITH WITH THE SUPREME SOVIET, THE LEGITIMATE LEGISLATURE OF THE COUNTRY, AND HAVE INSISTED ON SUPPORTING THEM AND NOT LUKASHENKO'S POCKET PARLIAMENT, THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. GIVING THE OPPOSITION CREDIBILITY IS A CRITICAL THING FOR US TO BE DOING IN THE WEST.

I MET YESTERDAY WITH ADRIAN SEVERIN, MY COLLEAGUE FROM THE OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, WHO WAS INVOLVED IN TALKS AMONG THE BELARUSIAN GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION, WITH THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE SO-CALLED TROIKA

CONSISTING OF THE OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. SEVEN MONTHS OF ON-AGAIN OFF-AGAIN TALKS BETWEEN THE REGIME AND THE OPPOSITION HAVE FAILED TO BEAR FRUIT, THANKS TO THE INTRANSIGENCE OF THE AUTHORITIES. GENUINE DIALOGUE WITH DEMOCRATIC FORCES IS ESSENTIAL IF BELARUS IS TO MOVE BEYOND THE CURRENT PERIOD OF STAGNATION. ACCESS TO STATE MEDIA BY THE OPPOSITION WILL BE CRUCIAL HERE. AND VERY IMPORTANTLY, IN ORDER TO GET BEYOND THE CONSTITUTIONAL IMPASSE, FREE AND DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SHOULD BE HELD THIS YEAR CONSISTENT WITH RELEVANT OSCE STANDARDS AND NORMS.

MR. CHAIRMAN, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE SEND A MESSAGE - LOUD AND CLEAR - TO THE DICTATOR IN MINSK THAT HIS GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUED ABUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND VIOLATION OF OSCE COMMITMENTS DEVASTATES THE PEOPLE OF BELARUS AND PROHIBITS HIS COUNTRY FROM TAKING ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE IN A FREE, PROSPEROUS AND DEMOCRATIC EUROPE. ULTIMATELY, HE WILL NOT PREVAIL.

THANK YOU, MR. CHAIRMAN