



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Sam Brownback

Chairman - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

This afternoon's hearing focuses on what many would call "the Balkans" but is more accurately labeled today as "South-Central Europe." This region is geographically to the south but otherwise central to Europe and European affairs today.

A central desire for the people of this region is to become an integrated part of Europe. Membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a widely held policy priority. The ending of the Cold War in the early 1990s made this movement possible, but a subsequent decade of regional conflict delayed the reforms necessary to make integration a reality. Now, just as some countries in the region have made remarkable strides to recover -- encouraging their neighbors to do the same -- there is concern that Europe will leave them behind.

I genuinely hope that this will not be the case and believe the candidacy of these countries to join European and Euro-Atlantic institutions will be strongest if they have solid democratic credentials. The purpose of this hearing, therefore, is to look specifically at the human rights situation and the degree of democratic development in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia in the hope of encouraging these countries to take the additional steps that will make integration possible.

This also applies to Kosovo, the status of which has yet to be determined. Whatever the outcome, the same human rights and democratic norms must apply, and the authorities in Kosovo should expect to be held accountable for their record of compliance. To be clear, the subject of this hearing is not about debating the future status of Kosovo but about making Kosovo a place where human rights and democratic principles are respected.

On the one hand, it is to the credit of the people in the region and many of their leaders that, so soon after the horrendous conflicts that occurred, they are as close to being ready for European and Euro-Atlantic integration as they are. On the other hand, there is much still to be done. Trafficking in persons remains a problem throughout the region, along with the associated evils of organized crime and official corruption. Restrictions on religious freedom, in law and in practice, indicate a lingering intolerance toward diversity. Discrimination and violence against Roma is a common problem too commonly ignored.

Beyond the regional problems, there are specific circumstances for each:

Bosnia, for example, must find a way to move beyond the Dayton Agreement which restored peace ten years ago but hinders true democracy in that country today.

Kosovo must consider how to accommodate its minority communities and give those displaced from a conflict seven years ago a real opportunity to return if they choose. This is an issue on which I have relayed my continuing interest to the State Department, and I want to thank the Department for its responsiveness to my concerns. The situation for minorities in Kosovo, however, remains bleak, and intensified efforts are needed if the situation there is to improve significantly.

Macedonia's next hurdle is the election only a few weeks away, which must meet international standards if the country is to maintain its integration momentum.

Serbia, meanwhile, must get serious about dealing with war crimes and the nationalist legacy of Slobodan Milosevic.

Montenegro, which we welcome as the newest European state and soon-to-be 56th participating States in the OSCE, must now demonstrate that independence opens the door to further democratic and economic reform.

Albania must similarly show its reforms are not just nice promises or good intentions but genuine commitment and solid reality.

Croatia, which has advanced the farthest thus far, has an opportunity to demonstrate that being ahead is not a cause to slow the pace, and that democratic governance is not a burden but a blessing for majority and minorities alike.

To address these issues we have for our first panel the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service valued not only for the position she holds in the Department but the knowledge and experience she brings to it. Her presentation of the views of the Department of State will be followed by analyses from experts on South-Central Europe and some of the issues of great concern in that region.