

U.S. Congress, Helsinki Commission Hearing, 15 June 2006
**HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY, AND INTEGRATION IN
SOUTH-CENTRAL EUROPE**

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Thank you for inviting me to testify before the Helsinki Commission and allowing me to present my views on the present and future of South-Central Europe. I will focus attention on the three U.S.-Adriatic Charter countries, Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia, as well as the newly restored state of Montenegro, in briefly discussing three issues: the progress of human rights, democratic consolidation, and international integration.

In sum, as compared to a decade ago the eastern Adriatic or Western Balkan region has become a zone of political stability and international cooperation. All four of these eastern Adriatic littoral states have made significant progress toward ensuring civil and minority rights according to prevailing European standards, consolidating their democratic and market systems, and pursuing beneficial bilateral and multilateral ties with neighbors. The next stage of evolution, especially once the outstanding status issue of Kosovo is finally resolved by international powers, must focus on good governance, economic development, international institutional integration, and the strengthening of regional and European security.

Human Rights

Albania: Albania's human rights record continues to make steady progress and more closely meets general European standards. The country's small ethnic minorities are not subject to violations or abuse and the country remains renowned for its religious tolerance. However, the Roma community continues to suffer from societal discrimination and concern has been expressed by human rights organizations over reported police abuses against prisoners, infringements on citizens' privacy rights, the politicization of the media, and violence and discrimination against women and children. All these issues will need to be addressed more effectively as Albania moves ahead toward potential candidacy status in the EU over the coming few years.

Croatia: Croatia has developed a respectable human rights record. However, although relations between majority Croats and minority Serbs have improved over the years, tensions still persist in some areas of the country amidst complaints that Zagreb has not done enough to encourage refugee returns and Serbian reintegration into Croatian society. While some of the criticism is justified, the number of refugees wishing to return to Croatia has also declined because of factors beyond the government's immediate control, including limited economic opportunities in rural areas and small towns, inadequate financial resources, and Serbian reluctance to return to impoverished areas of the country. Nonetheless, in order to enhance inter-ethnic and inter-state reconciliation Zagreb should

redouble its efforts to ensure minority representation in state institutions at central and local levels and provide more employment opportunities for returning Serbs.

Macedonia: The large Albanian minority in Macedonia has clearly benefited from the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement that terminated a potentially destructive guerrilla war launched by Albanian militants in the summer of 2001. Albanians are much more equitably represented in all state institutions and have acquired additional collective rights in language use and education, and have a major voice in legislation that affects ethnic minorities. However, the situation of the Roma population remains problematic as it does throughout the region, especially in terms of discrimination and the absence of affirmative action to enable Romanis to escape the cycle of poverty.

Montenegro: Montenegro has a multi-ethnic society in which national or religious identity has not played a divisive or conflictive role in the country's progress toward independence. Indeed, the majority of Montenegro's Albanian and Muslim communities voted together with Slavic Orthodox Montenegrins for an independent state. The sizeable Serbian minority, many of whom voted to preserve the union with Serbia, must also remain integrated in all state structures and benefit from independence and the new country's accelerated reform program in line with EU standards.

Democratic Consolidation

Albania: The new Democratic Party government has committed itself to pursuing crucial reforms, including a sustained campaign against organized criminality and official corruption, ensuring judicial efficiency and independence, and improving the functioning of public administration. Albania's destructive political polarization also needs to be tackled by encouraging parliamentary and national consensus on important reformist measures so that the losers in elections are not losers in the broader political process. Legal investigations against corrupt officials should not become a platform for political battles between the two largest parties and must be conducted on a strictly non-partisan basis.

Croatia: Croatia is a fully functioning pluralistic democracy with an effective multi-party system and capable executive, legislative, and judicial institutions. Since the beginning of the decade Zagreb has trimmed presidential powers and vested increasing authority in its parliamentary structures. This has reduced prospects for the replication of the Tadjman era when a personalistic quasi-authoritarian system was in place. Croatia has an independent mass media and numerous civic structures that can freely monitor, comment, and impact on government policy and holds politicians accountable to the rule of law.

Macedonia: Macedonia has successfully implemented all the stipulations in the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement. This has included an administrative reorganization that threatened to provoke inter-ethnic conflicts amidst accusations by some militant Macedonians that it would lead to a division of the country. Instead, the redistricting has

decentralized governmental authority and enabled local governments to gain a larger stake in economic development. In the long-term, the reforms will benefit inter-ethnic coexistence. However, progress still needs to be made on reforming the police service and the judiciary and dealing more effectively with official corruption. Macedonia faces parliamentary elections later this year and they should confirm the progress and stability that the country has achieved.

Montenegro: Montenegro possesses the infrastructure of an independent state with functioning administrative, legislative, and judicial institutions, a separate economic system, and the *euro* as the official currency. After the prolonged struggle to achieve statehood, Podgorica will now need to focus on meeting the criteria for EU candidate status. This will include administrative and judicial reform, combating official corruption, and other measures that are being implemented by Montenegro's Adriatic neighbors.

International Integration

Albania: Albania is engaged in the EU's Stabilization and Association Process (SAP). The Union called for improvements in Tirana's performance in fighting crime and corruption and in pursuing other reforms in order to conclude a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) and move toward EU candidate status. The SAA was signed on 12 June 2006. Albania also has a European Partnership with the EU, which defines short and medium term priorities for reform monitored by the European Commission.

Albania has maintained a close relationship with the U.S. and Washington supports the country's membership in NATO once Tirana completes essential military reforms. The Adriatic Charter countries have dispatched a joint 12-person medical team to the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) in Afghanistan, stationed in Kabul. This is the first international mission the Adriatic Charter members have conducted jointly. In addition, Albania has approximately 120 personnel in Iraq, under U.S. command, 30 soldiers with ISAF in Afghanistan, and about 60 peacekeepers alongside NATO in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Croatia: Of the four Adriatic states, Croatia is furthest along toward EU entry as an official candidate country. Zagreb's improved cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), particularly following the capture of indicted war criminal General Ante Gotovina, enabled the country to open negotiations on EU membership in October 2005. It also helped to put Croatia on track for NATO accession. Nevertheless, issues of minority rights and refugee returns will continue to be monitored as Croatia embarks on the process of meeting the voluminous EU criteria for accession. Croatia has upheld good relations with the U.S. and with NATO. 50 members of a Military Police platoon serve in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and 30 Croatian troops serve as UN peacekeepers in nine different trouble spots. Zagreb aspires to NATO membership and will need to complete a package of reforms in order to qualify for a formal invitation.

Macedonia: Macedonia attained candidate status with the EU in December 2005, although its accession discussions have not yet commenced. These will begin once the country is assessed by EU representatives as having reached a sufficient degree of compliance with the Union's membership criteria. A major report on Macedonia's progress toward EU accession is due to be issued by the close of 2006. Macedonia has developed a close relationship with the U.S. and has benefited from Washington's recognition of its constitutional name. Skopje has 35 personnel serving in Iraq with the Multi-National Division in Baghdad, and 20 soldiers with the NATO-led ISAF in Afghanistan.

Montenegro: A peaceful divorce will enable both Montenegro and Serbia to focus on their crucial domestic reforms and the arduous process of EU integration. Montenegro will no longer be held back by Belgrade's self-isolation due to its inability to arrest the indicted war criminal General Ratko Mladic. It can now redouble its commitment to structural reform and will be judged on its own performance. Montenegro entered the SAA process in 2005 as part of the EU's agreement with the Union of Serbia and Montenegro. In line with the "twin-track" approach, negotiations were launched with the State Union and with the two republics in their respective fields of competence in October 2005. With the break-up of the Union, Montenegro will have its own individual track through the SAA toward EU candidate status. Given Serbia's slowdown in relations with the EU, Montenegro is likely to move faster toward membership. Its small size and small economy may make it easier to complete necessary reforms, comply with EU standards, and move toward accession.

Independence for Montenegro and Serbia, and eventually Kosovo will create the underpinnings of credible states that are domestically legitimate and internationally recognized. This will also change the nature of international involvement from that of peace-enforcement and state building to economic investment and institutional integration throughout the Western Balkans. The final dissolution of post-Yugoslavia will also help terminate the rationale for the sizeable security apparatus that Serbia and Montenegro inherited from the Milosevic regime. The creation of light modernized detachments that can respond to contemporary threats will help reduce lingering security fears throughout the region and direct attention toward economic development and foreign investment.

Policy Recommendations

Consolidating Regional Security

- The U.S.-Adriatic Charter needs to become more focused in enabling Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia to move toward NATO accession. NATO's Riga Summit in November 2006 provides a valuable opportunity to affirm each country's progress in preparation for formal membership invitations in 2007 or early 2008.
- Montenegro should be invited to join the U.S.-Adriatic Charter as soon as feasible. This will help to engage the new state in a number of regional and trans-

Atlantic security initiatives. Montenegro also meets the criteria for inclusion in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. To attain Alliance membership, Podgorica will be required to accelerate its military reform program and comply with NATO's Membership Action Plans (MAPs). Montenegro also needs assistance from the U.S. and NATO in the establishing its own Ministry of Defense. Montenegro's restored international role will help the NATO allies in countering security threats along Europe's expanding borders in the Adriatic-Balkan-Black Sea zone, including ethnic strife, political and religious terrorism, organized crime, and energy insecurity.

Promoting Democratic Governance

- Momentum must be given in promoting effective democratic governance across the region and cooperation across borders as witnessed in the most successful parts of Central-Eastern Europe where countries were given firm prospects for EU and NATO accession. There are continuing concerns in some states about the performance of government institutions, the level of official corruption, and the extent of administrative and legal transparency.

Stimulating Economic Development

- Each country in the Adriatic-Balkan region must aim to ensure administrative reform, transparent privatization, and a legislative and taxation system that attracts foreign investment and releases private enterprise. This will be the most effective impetus for economic development in a region stifled by a confluence of negatives: the legacies of communism and statism, the impact of recent wars, corruption, criminality, mismanagement, international isolation, and institutional dependency.
- A concerted international investment effort must be undertaken to upgrade, and in some cases rebuild altogether, the basic cross-regional infrastructure network such as road, rail, energy systems, and telecommunications. The Western Balkan market of some 25 million people can thereby capitalize on more significant and targeted foreign direct investments.

South Central Europe or South Eastern Europe remains a stellar example where the U.S. and the EU have worked closely together to expand the zone of European security. With its Balkan stabilization mission completed, the Allies will be able to focus more intensively on the next phase of trans-Atlantic enlargement and Allied security in the Black Sea, Caspian, and Central Asian regions.