



OPENING STATEMENT

**Senator Benjamin L. Cardin
Chairman**

Hearing on “Political Pluralism in the OSCE Mediterranean Partners?”

*July 9, 2014
(as prepared for delivery)*

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished witnesses and guests, I wish to welcome you to this Helsinki Commission hearing on “Political Pluralism in the OSCE Mediterranean Partners?” The Helsinki Commission has long prioritized engagement with our Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Partners for Cooperation in both the Mediterranean and Asia. I have seen the potential for the Helsinki Process as a model for both partner regions and I have led Commission efforts over the years on this concept. Our Commissioners, including Representative Alcee Hastings as OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs, have led efforts in the OSCE PA to promote the interests of our

Mediterranean Partners and forge a meaningful exchange for mutual learning; not just one-sided engagement in the region by external actors.

We could say that the political transitions resulting from popular uprisings at the end of 2010 have changed the face of OSCE engagement with the region. These years since have brought successes with some structural reforms and challenges in the development of viable political parties and electoral systems. Our Partners, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, have had very different experiences based on their different political systems. I see this hearing as a timely opportunity to explore common elements of transition among these countries and revisit how best to foster cooperation through OSCE mechanisms. As exemplified by the deployment of OSCE resources and expertise to manage the crisis in Ukraine, the OSCE remains a functional tool for fostering human security and a potential model for advancing common human security in the Mediterranean.

The Helsinki Commission last convened a hearing taking stock of political developments and overall engagement with all of our OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation in 2009. That year, I worked with Representative Hastings to convene a hearing on “The Future of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation” coupled with an international seminar of parliamentarians from throughout the region exploring Mediterranean Partner engagementⁱ. This event recommended functional partnership initiatives with our Mediterranean Partners including projects for youth exchange and broader accessibility of OSCE initiatives for participants from the region. Our efforts also identified priorities for more leadership of the Mediterranean Partnership from the region, which has become particularly relevant with the emerging empowerment of long disenfranchised voices of political opposition. Those voices have been both productive and disconcerting. Yet, the establishment of impartial electoral systems will

lead the region to responsive governments that address the motivations of those who took to the streets.

The OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly have been able to generate unique opportunities for assistance in this new era of regional cooperation. For example, the OSCE PA was able to deploy an observation and assistance mission for the October 2011 elections to the Tunisian Constituent National Assembly. The OSCE has been able to facilitate exchanges with young diplomats from the region to serve in the OSCE secretariat. Additionally, key materials from thematic units of the OSCE and the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights have been translated into Arabic. Civil society and experts from the region have become increasingly active in OSCE events and dialogue opportunities coupled with expert visits from OSCE institutions to advise governments as they review their structural reforms. All of these activities have been possible through the OSCE Partnership Fund of

extra-budgetary contributions from participating States and Partners. These activities truly demonstrate the depth of a relationship stemming back to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and leading into the future.

Our first panel features Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs for Egypt and the Maghreb Bill Roebuck. A distinguished career Foreign Service officer with experience throughout the region, including service at pivotal times as Chargé d'Affaires to Tripoli, as well as Head of the Political Section/Acting Deputy Chief of Mission in Damascus. We look forward to hearing your perspectives on strategic investments through the OSCE, international partnerships and other initiatives like the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) to address political reforms in the region.

Our second panel will feature a broad cross-section of expertise on the region starting with Ambassador Bill Taylor, Vice President for

Middle East and Africa of the United States Institute of Peace. Ambassador Taylor most recently served as State Department Special Coordinator for Middle East Transitions coordinating support to Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria following a distinguished career at State and work in the region. He will be followed by Dr. Shibley [SHH-BUH-LEE] Telhami [TELL-HAH-MEE], Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland and Brookings Institution Fellow. Dr. Telhami has made pivotal contributions to Arab –Israeli Peace Process negotiations and is an expert on public opinion trends in our countries of interest today. Our expert panel will be concluded by Ms. Zeinab [ZAY-NAH-BUH] Abdelkarim [AHB-DELL-KAH-REEM], Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Her expertise in electoral assistance will help us characterize the state of reforms in the political processes throughout our countries of interest.

I see this hearing as an opportunity to examine not only the OSCE's development of institutional cooperation, but also the role of international actors and civil society in fostering political systems that respond to the needs of the region. As noted in the Helsinki Final Act, the security of Europe is closely linked with security in the Mediterranean as a whole. We look to our panels now for their thoughts on the development of political pluralism in the Mediterranean in recognition of our common security interests. Thank you for taking the time to join us.

ⁱ Report on the U.S. Helsinki Commission Seminar on OSCE Mediterranean Partner Engagement: http://csce.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=ContentRecords.ViewDetail&ContentRecord_id=467&Region_id=0&Issue_id=0&ContentType=G&ContentRecordType=G&CFID=24070648&CFTOKEN=5dfcd53f8cbeca93-AE1814C2-0A22-5187-EE2C4FC7CB3E80D5