

**Helsinki Commission Hearing on:  
Global Threats, European Security and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation  
Wednesday June 16, 2010**

**Senator Benjamin L. Cardin, Chairman  
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

**Opening Statement**

At the outset of this hearing we would like to express our condolences to the families of victims of the terrible violence occurring in Kyrgyzstan. According to the latest reports, the situation seems to be stabilizing but since last week we have witnessed widespread bloodshed and ethnic cleansing in an OSCE State. I am sure President Soares will want to discuss this very serious issue in greater detail but I wanted at this juncture to at least acknowledge these events and express our concerns before we go on.

Today's hearing of the Helsinki Commission is one in a regular series of hearings we have had in recent years. In these hearings, instead of focusing on a specific issue or country, we hear the views of an important official on the entire range of human rights, security and economic and environmental issues which are the basis for the Helsinki Commission's ongoing work.

There is a tradition of having senior U.S. officials appear annually before the Commission to discuss U.S. policy toward the OSCE, and we regularly invite the Chair-in-Office to appear early on in their tenure to exchange our respective goals and priorities for the OSCE in the coming year.

As today's hearing demonstrates, we have also developed the tradition of having the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly presenting testimony as well, relying on the expertise of a leading parliamentarian who can exchange views with us on the same range of issues but with fewer of the constraints that diplomatic or executive-branch office often impose on our other witnesses.

This hearing comes at an important time. The OSCE is in the midst of its consideration of whether to schedule a summit of heads of state or government. This is something which has not been done since 1999, and the world has changed significantly since then. The OSCE is also reviewing its activities and taking a hard look at itself through the Corfu process, in the hope of making its work more relevant to the 21st century. As it does, the OSCE has increasingly been compelled to shift its attention from threats to security within the region to threats from outside the region where a common and coordinated response is required, such as terrorism and nuclear security.

In my view, the success of this multilateral diplomatic effort hinges not only the ability to achieve consensus on these matters among the 56 participating States, as difficult as that is alone to accomplish. It also hinges on the actions and policies of the OSCE participating States themselves, as compared to their freely undertaken OSCE commitments.

If OSCE States ignore or violate their own freely undertaken commitments to respect human rights and each others' borders, then what credibility can the OSCE have as it seeks to respond to global threats and enhance European security? The reality is that many countries, including those of Central Asia and some in the heart of Europe like Belarus, make little if any pretence of respecting OSCE norms. Russia blatantly invades Georgia and recognizes breakaway regions. Claiming to seek to advance the OSCE process through their initiatives, Russia and several other countries seek instead to re-negotiate existing commitments that may man less power for those in power.

The challenge before us, therefore, is not an easy one, and it necessitates active engagement with those with whom we disagree but also a strong defense of what we have achieved so far and hold dear to our democratic values.

Appearing before us today is the Honorable Joao Soares, a member of the parliament of Portugal and, for the next few weeks, the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. While an active leader in the past two years within the OSCE, Joao Soares came to his current position already well versed in the issues and challenges I just described. His biography is available, so I will not repeat his accomplishments here. Instead, I want to use this introduction to thank Joao Soares for his generous use of his political skills to engage the OSCE and its States on a variety of fronts, and for his friendship toward the United States and those of us in the U.S. Congress who have come to know him. Mr. Soares, let me welcome you here today.