



# HELSINKI COMMISSION DIGEST

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### **BIPARTISAN U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION DELEGATION DEFENDS UKRAINE, RAISES CONCERNS ABOUT RUSSIA AT OSCE PARLIAMENTARY SESSION; VISITS AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA, AND MOLDOVA**

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From June 27 to July 3, 2014, a bicameral, bipartisan delegation of eight Members of Congress represented the United States at the annual session of the OSCE's 57-nation Parliamentary Assembly in Baku, Azerbaijan. The delegation, which was organized by the U.S. Helsinki Commission, also made side visits to Georgia and Moldova.

The congressional delegation was led by the Commission Chairman, Senator Ben Cardin (MD), while the Co-Chairman, Representative Chris Smith (NJ-04) was head of delegation at the Assembly session. The Commission's Ranking Senator, Roger Wicker (MS) and House Commissioners Robert Aderholt (AL-04) and Phil Gingrey (GA-11) also participated, along with Senator Tom Harkin (IA) and Representatives David Schweikert (AZ-06) and Adam Schiff (CA-28).

A central concern at the Assembly meeting, as well as during bilateral interaction with the authorities and people of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, was Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea and its incursions into eastern Ukraine. The congressional delegation was highly critical of Moscow's attempt to reassert its domination over the affairs of its neighbors more than two decades after the Soviet Union's collapse, and it reassured friends and allies of the deep and continuing commitment of the United States to security and cooperation in Europe and throughout the OSCE region.

#### **About the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**

Created within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – the OSCE – the OSCE PA is an independent, consultative body comprising 323 parliamentarians from across the OSCE region. Annual Sessions are the chief venue for debating issues of the day as well as for issuing declarations addressing human rights, democratic development, and the rule of law; economic cooperation and environmental protection; and confidence and security among the participating States and globally. Active congressional participation in the OSCE PA has ensured that matters of interest to the United States are raised and discussed, and robust U.S. engagement has been a hallmark of the Parliamentary Assembly since its inception more than 20 years ago.

## OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Session in Baku

The congressional delegation was organized primarily to represent the United States at the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), which took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, from June 28 to July 2.

The U.S. delegation fielded two of the 18 resolutions considered at the annual session, as well as a total of 19 amendments to several of these resolutions. This level of activity is the norm of previous U.S. delegations almost twice the size, and it required a constant presence of Members in the committees and plenary sessions to manage their consideration and passage. Each member of the delegation was responsible for making at least one concrete contribution to the U.S. effort.

Key among the U.S. initiatives as well as all items considered at the annual session was a resolution sponsored by Senator Cardin which condemned Russia's direct support of a separatist insurrection in Ukraine as a violation of Helsinki principles. Among other things, it called for a firm international response, including a refusal to recognize the illegitimate annexation of Crimea by Russia, and urged Moscow to respect the sovereignty of Ukraine and all of its neighbors. The Russian delegation attempted to undermine support for the resolution, alleging that it misrepresented the situation in Ukraine as well as Moscow's role, and it argued that the resolution's confrontational approach could damage efforts to end the conflict through dialogue. In response, the United States and other delegations argued that there could be no compromise when it came to defense of Helsinki principles and that the resolution called for action that Russia must take regardless of any talks or mediation efforts. Although there was not a specific call to suspend the Russian Federation from the OSCE, the resolution defined Moscow's actions as "clear, gross and uncorrected violations" of Helsinki principles that could warrant such action based on an 1991 OSCE mechanism.

Senator Wicker and Representative Smith, attending a committee session of heads of delegation and OSCE PA officers prior to the annual session, successfully defended the resolution from an early Russian effort to block its consideration, while in plenary debate Representative Schiff joined Cardin and Smith with an impassioned call for the Assembly to support an embattled Ukraine at this time. The amendment process actually strengthened the text with calls for democracy in Russia, not only for the benefit of Russian citizens but the strengthening of regional stability, while repeated Russian efforts to delete paragraphs were all defeated. The resolution was adopted by a 3 to 1 favorable vote, with as many as half those voting against passage coming from the Russian delegation itself. This decisive result took place in a forum where Russia has a voice, votes, and influence, thereby sending the Kremlin a strong message about its current course and behavior.

Representative Smith sponsored a second U.S. resolution, which focused on efforts to combat child sex trafficking. As the Assembly's Special Representative on Human Trafficking, Mr. Smith regularly proposes suggestions to the Assembly on how to strengthen the response to this modern-day form of human slavery. Among this year's suggestions was the formation of a notification system among countries regarding the travel of persons convicted of sex crimes against children, as well as increased cooperation between law enforcement agencies and with the travel industry to prevent child sex tourism.



Helsinki Commission  
Chairman Ben Cardin

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Helsinki Commission Co-  
Chairman Chris Smith

**continued...**

## OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Session in Baku, continued

Among other U.S. initiatives, Senator Harkin successfully pushed a package of amendments to a resolution on economic issues that called on participating States to provide access and equal opportunity to persons with disabilities, including by ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. He argued that such efforts encourage economic growth by creating opportunities for disabled persons both as workers and consumers. Senator Cardin amended the same resolution with a call for developing an OSCE mechanism that would more effectively respond to corruption in the participating States. Senator Wicker inserted new language into a security-focused resolution supporting military inspections and timely observation of military activities as a confidence-builder of particular importance, particularly during times of instability and uncertainty. He also spoke during debate on a resolution regarding OSCE engagement with Afghanistan, an OSCE Partner, calling for greater stability and democracy as international forces withdrawal in 2014.

Representative Aderholt, who serves as one of nine OSCE PA Vice Presidents, achieved passage of several amendments focusing on Western Balkan countries, their human rights record and contributions to European security and cooperation, as well as their aspirations to join the EU and NATO. In a separate initiative, Representative Aderholt also requested that Turkmenistan inform the families of some two dozen political prisoners of their condition, including in some cases whether they are still even alive. Representative Schweikert won passage of amendments that encourage increased outreach by the OSCE to Mediterranean Partner countries, while Representative Gingrey achieved agreement to a call for innovation that makes energy not only more environmentally friendly but affordable to family and small business consumers as well. Representative Smith and Senator Cardin joined an initiative with the Canadian delegation calling for more vigorous responses to reprehensible acts of anti-Semitism.



*A very active U.S. Delegation included, from top, Senator Wicker; Representative Schiff; Senators Cardin and Harkin and Representatives Gingrey and Schweikert; and Representatives Aderholt and Smith.*

## Visiting U.S. Forces in Germany

En route back to the United States, the delegation made a brief visit to Ramstein Air Base in Germany, where it met with the U.S. Air Force command in Europe as well as Air Force personnel. Members expressed appreciation for the strong U.S. presence in Europe, without which the congressional delegation could not have reassured European partners throughout its travels of U.S. support in the face of ongoing security threats.



*U.S Air Force Command greets delegation at Ramstein Air Base*

## Bilateral Talks in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova

While in Baku, the delegation held bilateral meetings with the Government of Azerbaijan, meeting with President Ilham Aliyev as well as with representatives of civil society fighting for media freedom, rule of law, and disability rights in Azerbaijan. In a U.S. Helsinki Commission hearing held prior to the Commission's trip (see hearing record here), Chairman Cardin stated that "the United States considers Azerbaijan an important friend and partner in the region and that means we care deeply about its development." The hearing went on to outline a number of concerns regarding the conduct of the presidential election in 2013 as well as an ongoing crackdown on the opposition, civil society and the media.

At a roundtable of NGOs, members met with Ms. Leyla Yunus, Director, Institute for Peace and Democracy; Mr. Asabali Mustafayev, Director of the Democracy and Human Rights Resource Center; and Mr. Elchin Shikhli, Editor in Chief of the now-shuttered Zerkalo newspaper. All reported that their ability to work freely in Azerbaijan is being rapidly curtailed and that many of their colleagues are now in jail or are under investigation. Mr. Aydin Khalilov, Director of the Development and Support Center, an NGO that supports the rights of the physically impaired, discussed the legal and social difficulties that handicapped individuals face in Azerbaijan. Following the trip, Chairman Cardin called on President Aliyev to stop the harassment and imprisonment of those with independent voices, saying, "We want to work with the government of Azerbaijan to help them fulfill their OSCE commitments to free media and freedom of association and will continue to advocate for those who are working toward democratic norms in Azerbaijan."

In Tbilisi, Georgia, and Chisinau, Moldova, the delegation held bilateral meetings to discuss expanded ties with the United States as well as regional security in the wake of the crisis in Ukraine. In Georgia, the delegation met with the President, Prime Minister, and the leadership of the United National Movement opposition party to offer U.S. support and underscore the need for further democratic reforms, particularly in building a robust and independent judiciary that is free from corruption and untainted by even the appearance of politically-motivated prosecutions. Georgia's leadership and loyal opposition present a positive regional model for a troubled region.

In Moldova, the delegation met the Prime Minister, leading political figures across the spectrum, and representatives of civil society. Additionally, this visit took place just as the national parliament was ratifying an historic trade agreement with the European Union. Heartfelt congratulations were offered to Moldova's leadership as they move toward greater Euro-Atlantic integration, which offers a real shot at greater prosperity and stability for what is currently Europe's poorest country. The U.S. side also offered support in the face of Russia's vindictive actions and threats clearly aimed at derailing the democratic choice of Moldova's leadership.



*Senators Cardin and Harkin meet with NGOs in Baku*



*U.S. Delegation speaks with the press in Tbilisi*

### About the U.S. Helsinki Commission

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent agency of the Federal Government charged with monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords and advancing comprehensive security through promotion of human rights, democracy, and economic, environmental and military cooperation in 57 countries.

Learn more at [www.csce.gov](http://www.csce.gov).