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HELSINKI COMMISSION ORGANIZES BIPARTISAN CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO REPRESENT UNITED STATES AT OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY SESSION IN HELSINKI

Delegation Also Visits Embattled Ukraine and NATO Ally Czech Republic

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Forty years after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act established the precursor to today's Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), five members of the Helsinki Commission and four other members of Congress traveled to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA) Annual Session in Helsinki to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to confronting Russian aggression in Ukraine and elsewhere.

Led by Commission Co-Chairman Senator Roger F. Wicker (MS), the bicameral, bipartisan delegation organized by the Helsinki Commission included Commission Chairman

Representative Chris Smith (NJ-04); House Commissioners Robert B. Aderholt (AL-04), Steve Cohen (TN-09) and Alan Grayson (FL-09); and Representatives Gwen Moore (WI-04), Michael Fitzpatrick (PA-08), Richard Hudson (NC-08) and Ruben Gallego (AZ-07).



Members of the U.S. Delegation, led by Senator Roger Wicker, vote in the plenary session.

Before attending the Annual Session from July 5 to 7, several members of the delegation also visited Ukraine and the Czech Republic. A central concern to the delegation throughout the trip was Russia's restrictions on democracy at home and aggression in Ukraine, along with Russia's threat to European security.

Did you know ...

the meeting of the 35 heads of state or government who signed the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 represented the largest assembly of European heads of state or government since the Congress of Vienna in 1815?

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Annual Session in Helsinki

Two related issues dominated the agenda at Helsinki: the 40th anniversary of the signing of Helsinki Final Act and the greatest challenge which the OSCE faces today – the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine and threats to other neighboring or nearby counties.

The Spirit of Helsinki

Drawing on the “spirit of Helsinki,” the annual session was held in the same Finlandia Hall where the Final Act was originally signed in 1975. The OSCE PA contributed to the discussion on how to keep the OSCE relevant and responsive to current and future challenges through a pre-session seminar on “Helsinki +40,” organized by the Finnish Institute on International Affairs and attended by the U.S. delegation, as well as through presentations and the adoption of a related Portuguese-led resolution during plenary sessions.

Russian Aggression against Ukraine

Following an unsuccessful attempt by Moscow to include several parliamentarians facing EU visa sanctions in the Russian delegation, the entire Russian

delegation boycotted the Annual Session. (After a considerable review of options, the government of Finland decided to enforce existing EU sanctions by denying visas to the parliamentarians on the Russian delegation who were on the EU visa sanctions list.)

Resulting deliberations, including of a Canadian-led resolution condemning the continuation of “clear, gross and uncorrected” violations of all 10 Helsinki principles by the Russian Federation in and around Ukraine, divided the delegates between those prioritizing the defense of the Helsinki principles, and those prioritizing dialogue among parliamentarians.

The former approach easily prevailed, with Senator Wicker and Representative Smith contributing to the debate in support of the subsequently adopted Canadian resolution, which built upon a similar resolution fielded by former Commission Chair Senator Ben Cardin (MD) at last year’s annual session. The Ukrainian delegation strongly supported the text and introduced its own



Helsinki Commission Chair Representative Chris Smith speaks at the OSCE PA Plenary Session.

resolution on Ukrainian citizens abducted and illegally detained by Russian forces during the course of the ongoing conflict.

U.S. Initiatives

The U.S. delegation fielded its own resolution in Helsinki, one of a total of 16 considered. The resolution, “Responsibility to Combat Human Trafficking in Government Contracts for Good and Services,” was introduced by Representative Smith and proposed steps to ensure that government contractors and their employees do not create increased demand for human trafficking or exploit trafficking victims. The resolution was overwhelmingly supported.

About the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Created within the framework of the OSCE, the Parliamentary Assembly includes 323 members of national parliaments from across the OSCE region. Annual sessions offer the opportunity to debate current issues and respond to them through the consideration and passage of resolutions that collectively address security and confidence-building among the participating States and with partner countries in the Mediterranean and Asia; economic cooperation and environmental protection; and human rights, democratic development, and the rule of law. The Assembly is supported by a small secretariat based in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Unlike the OSCE itself, which operates on the basis of consensus of all participating States, the OSCE PA’s decision-making is by majority vote, with each delegation roughly proportional to a country’s population. This often allows Assembly declarations to be more direct and frank in their assessments than their diplomatic counterparts.

Since the Assembly’s inception in the early 1990s, robust U.S. engagement has provided an assurance of the depth of the U.S. commitment to European security. This engagement manifests itself in a consistent contribution of ideas and issues of concern, and strong representation in the OSCE PA leadership. It remained evident in Helsinki, despite the need for an early return to Washington for Senate and House floor votes.

Annual Session, continued

Other U.S. initiatives included a set of four amendments Senator Wicker made to the Canadian resolution on Russian violations of international norms in Ukraine, which together called on participating States to provide the support Ukraine needs to implement reforms and tackle corruption in a time of crisis. Representative Moore added an amendment to another resolution calling for a high-level meeting and other action to address racism, particularly in law enforcement.

Representative Cohen added language to the same resolution that called for increased efforts to combat anti-Semitism throughout the OSCE region.



Helsinki Commissioner Representative Robert Aderholt (center) was re-elected as a Vice President of the OSCE PA.

In the economic and environmental sphere, Representative Gallego successfully fielded two amendments addressing the impact of global pollinator decline on agriculture. Representatives Aderholt and Fitzpatrick spoke on the consideration of draft resolutions and amendments as well.

The Helsinki Declaration

The final 16 resolutions, which combined to form the Helsinki Declaration, addressed important issues ranging from dealing with “foreign fighters” from OSCE States who join terrorist organizations and managing missing persons in the aftermath of conflict and catastrophe to recent mass migrations to Europe across the Mediterranean Sea and the environmental challenges and economic opportunities in the polar north.

In the Standing Committee, the OSCE PA’s leading executive body, Repre-

sentative Smith provided a report on his activity as the Assembly’s Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues. Senator Cardin also submitted a report as the Assembly’s Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism and Intolerance.

Among the Standing Commission’s decisions was the selection of Roberto Montella of Italy to succeed American Spencer Oliver as the OSCE PA’s Secretary General in January 2016. Oliver, the first chief of staff of the Helsinki Commission from 1976 to 1985, has been the OSCE PA’s Secretary General since its founding in 1991.

On several occasions during the annual session, Secretary General Oliver was praised for his work building the Assembly’s capacity and dedication to the Helsinki Process from the early 1970s to the present.

As the annual session drew to a close, it held elections for its senior representatives and committee officers. Representative Aderholt was re-elected to a second term as one of nine OSCE Vice Presidents, and Senator Wicker was elected to a full term as chair of the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security, a position which he was appointed to fill following a vacancy in December 2014. The presence of two Members of the U.S. Congress in the OSCE PA leadership will help ensure that the Assembly remains responsive to U.S. interests.

Expressing Support for Ukraine in Kyiv

Support for Ukraine’s ongoing struggle with combined Russian-separatist forces in the east remains a major priority for the Helsinki Commission and Congress. In Kyiv, the delegation received firsthand updates on security challenges and demonstrated America’s solidarity with Ukraine in the face of Russia’s egregious transgressions.

In consultations with President Petro Poroshenko, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Members of the Verkhovna Rada and others, delegation members reiterated their commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and explored ways in which the U.S. might best assist Ukraine.



In Kyiv, members of the delegation met with (from top) Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, President Petro Poroshenko, and officials from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.

Euro-Atlantic Security and Media Freedom in Prague

As part of a broader effort to reassure European NATO allies of U.S. support in light of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, members of the delegation met with senior Czech officials in Prague—including First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Andrej Babis, Deputy Minister Defense Jakub Lando-vsky, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Security and Multilateral Issues Jakub Kulhanek, and Chamber of Deputies Member Ivana Dobesova, Head of the Czech Republic Delegation to the OSCE PA—to reinforce transatlantic cooperation between the U.S. and the Czech Republic.

The delegation marked U.S. Independence Day at the headquarters of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE/RL),

the nonprofit broadcaster funded by Congress to promote democratic values by reporting the news in countries where a free press is banned by the government or not fully established. RFE/RL also plays a key role in combating propaganda coming from Russia and elsewhere.

Nenad Pejic, RFE/RL Editor-in-Chief, moderated discussions among members of the delegation and regional service directors, journalists, and media freedom experts. Key issues included emerging disinformation campaigns in the OSCE region, countering violent extremist propaganda, evolving digital strategies for effective programming, and supporting journalists in trouble. RFE/RL experts characterized the effectiveness of their programming despite

looming challenges to the sustainability of their operations in Eurasia, particularly the Russian Federation, Central Asia and the Middle East.

Members concluded the day by honoring the victims communist police violence during the pro-democracy demonstrations of the November 1989 Velvet Revolution in then-Czechoslovakia. The delegation offered a wreath at the Velvet Revolution in solidarity with civil society sacrifices to advance fundamental freedoms and human rights.



In Prague, members of the delegation met with (from left) Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Security and Multilateral Issues Jakub Kulhanek, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Andrej Babis, and editorial staff from RFE/RL.

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.

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