



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Rep. Steny Hoyer

House Democratic Whip - U.S. House of Representatives

Thank you, members of the Commission, for this opportunity to make a statement. I want to thank the Commission for conducting this critical hearing as well as to extend my gratitude to the three witnesses, each of whom serves a critical function in advancing the OSCE's mission of protecting freedom and democracy.

Nowhere is that mission more visible today than in Ukraine, where OSCE personnel have helped oversee elections, monitor the border, and report on key security developments. OSCE is on the frontlines of the somber work of collecting bodies from the wreckage of Malaysian Flight 17 and securing the crash site.

OSCE also continues to be focused on the scourge of racism and discrimination. In the Helsinki Final Act, signed in 1975, the participating states made this declaration: 'The participating states will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. ...[They] recognize the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for which is an essential factor in the peace, justice, and well-being necessary to ensure the development of friendly relations and cooperation among themselves as among all states.'

Your work as personal representatives to the OSCE on these issues is integral to the organization's overall effort. Never has your work been more important.

Anti-Semitism and other forms of racism and xenophobia have been on the rise in recent years in the OSCE region, and in recent days we have seen disturbing protests in France and elsewhere that have included anti-Semitic attacks. I sent a letter last week to the president of the Abravanel Synagogue in Paris expressing solidarity with his congregation in light of an incident on July 13, in which a mob protesting Israel's defensive actions against Hamas besieged the synagogue and began throwing stones and other objects at the building and its security guards. At the same time, we hear too frequently of anti-Semitic and other racist chants at sporting events across the continent as well as entertainers who make comments disparaging the Holocaust and celebrating Nazism.

We've seen what these forces can do, and we must never forget the tragedies of the twentieth century that took so many innocent lives. "Russia's proxy war to 'defend minorities' – as they call it – in Ukraine is particularly offensive in light of this history. It cuts at the very order the

OSCE and its supporters protect. The first and second world wars were instigated, in part, as a result of the pretext of 'protecting' ethnic minorities abroad. Russia is now using that same argument to tear at the very heart of the international order for peace and stability that was established over the last century at the cost of many American and allied lives – and we cannot let that happen.

That's why today's hearing is so critically important. I thank the Commission for continuing to make these issues a priority and for making a strong stand against these forms of hatred that threaten to undermine our freedom.