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**Address by Mr. Goran LENNMARKER,
President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
to the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
(U.S. Helsinki Commission)
Washington, DC, October 18, 2007**

It is with great pleasure and deep honor to appear here today before the Helsinki Commission of the U.S. Congress, and I would like to thank the members of the Commission for inviting me, in particular the Commission's chairman and President Emeritus of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, my good friend, Alcee Hastings, as well as its co-chairman, Senator Benjamin Cardin, who is one of the Vice Presidents of our Assembly.

I am also pleased to note that I am accompanied here by the Assembly's Secretary General, Spencer Oliver, who was the first Staff Director of the Helsinki Commission.

The work of the Helsinki Commission and the participation of the United States in OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly have been invaluable to our organization. In fact, the membership of the U.S. and of Canada in our organization makes it unique – it is truly an organization that stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok, and we want to strengthen the important transatlantic link in order for the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly to be able to meet all the numerous challenges in the OSCE world.

Today, Europe is doing well. It is whole and it is free, and it is in peace. Its security is better than ever, its economy is flourishing, and, particularly in its Eastern half, it is growing fast. Democracy and human rights have made dramatic progress since 1989. But in the young nations in the East, terrorism remains a threat and corruption and the lack of rule of law hamper economic progress. And there are still dictatorships in the OSCE area in the 21st Century – we did not expect this 15 years ago. So we still have a big job to do.

Europe today is based on free nations coming together for the good of all. We must concentrate our efforts to maintain that spirit of cooperation. The Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty must be kept. We should strive for open skies and open military budgets and work for transparency and for civilian and parliamentary control of the military and security. And the European Union should continue to expand and I am personally in favor of EU membership for Turkey.

And we must continue to try to find peaceful solutions to the unresolved, so-called "frozen" conflicts, in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transdnistria, and, yes, Kosovo, all carry high human, economic and political costs.

For almost four years, I have been actively involved in supporting the OSCE Minsk Group's attempts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan about Nagorno-

Karabakh. I have emphasized that I see "a golden opportunity" for a peace agreement. I still believe so. A good framework agreement has been presented by the Minsk Group, led by France, Russia and the United States. It is ready to be signed by the leaders of the two countries, if the political will is there.

The alternative, a new war, is unthinkable. The advantages of a peace accord for the whole region are huge. With peace, all three countries in the South Caucasus could, together, start to strive to build a region characterized by security, democracy, and prosperity.

What happens in the East, in the Ukraine, Belarus, and in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia, is crucially important to all of Europe and to North America. However, we must also understand the difficulties facing newly created nations in building strong independent and democratic societies. The completion of that task will not happen overnight and that is why the elections in Serbia last January pleased me so much, for they showed that even in a country so recently involved in conflict and war, can, if the political will is there, make substantive strides towards democracy. Serbia's free and fair elections were impressive.

For the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly there are at least three important, unfinished tasks: the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, and I believe that OSCE should now focus its work on conflict resolution and democracy building in the transitioning democracies in the East. These countries are full and equal members of the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly. We need to hear their voices in our meetings and our discussions. We strongly prefer co-operation and dialogue over isolation and silence. We should intensify a dialogue about common problems and the sharing of experiences and encourage regional cooperation, including trade – a prime motor in creating wealth. Where there is vibrant trade, there is usually peace.

As the only regional organization in which North America, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Europe are all members, the OSCE is well suited to fulfill this task. In fact, its transatlantic and Central Asian dimensions make it not only unique, but also absolutely indispensable.

A central theme of my Presidency has been to engage Central Asia in our work. That is why I earlier this year visited all five member states in Central Asia to encourage them to be active in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and work towards greater regional parliamentary co-operation. That is why the Parliamentary Assembly has decided to hold next year's Annual Session in Kazakhstan and why I, personally, support Kazakhstan's candidacy for the OSCE Chairmanship in 2009.

An Assembly initiative has recently been launched with the active support of the Nordic Council and its five Northern European member countries, to explore the possibility to host a conference this fall in Oslo, Norway, on encouraging greater regional parliamentary cooperation between the five Central Asian nations.

I hope for a more active engagement from the United States in our efforts to reach out to the countries in Central Asia.

The OSCE is not a diminishing Organization. Its work in conflict resolution and in strengthening democracy and human rights is crucial. We need a strong OSCE to contribute to solving the political, economic and social challenges facing our societies. Today, more than ever, we must use our organization as an instrument for political dialogue.

The OSCE field missions are the heart of this Organization. The Assembly has reiterated that the OSCE must continue making full use of its field presence, providing them with all necessary means to increase their effectiveness.

We need the active participation of the United States Congress and its members. For that, we need to find a mechanism that will allow members of the U.S. Congress to travel and participate in the many international meetings and conferences taking place in the OSCE area. I don't know how that mechanism could look, but this is a vitally important matter and I hope to be able to discuss it further during my visit here in Washington

As President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly I have tried to further strengthen the role of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. It is an essential OSCE Institution and should be seen as an asset for the OSCE as a whole in order to provide assistance to the OSCE in helping solve remaining conflicts and preventing new ones from erupting; to increase the respect for human rights; to fight against human trafficking; and to strengthen OSCE election observation.

The OSCE Charter for European Security adopted at the last Summit in Istanbul in 1999, adopted a resolution stating:

“The Parliamentary Assembly has developed into one of the most important OSCE institutions continuously providing news ideas and proposals. We welcome this increasing role, particularly in the field of democratic development and election monitoring.”

Members of parliaments pass laws, approve national budgets and taxes, and scrutinize governments. Parliaments and parliamentarians also provide valuable assistance to international co-operation and development. The importance of parliamentary oversight and accountability in international organizations – including the OSCE - is essential and oversight mechanisms need to be built in to the system.

The Parliamentary Assembly's Brussels Declaration from 2006 emphasized *“the necessity of more effective enforcement of the monitoring mechanism of the work of the OSCE in order to increase the efficiency of the organization and to ensure a higher level of transparency and accountability in the Organization.”*

Unfortunately, not much has been achieved, at least so far, at OSCE headquarters in Vienna. But as we all try to promote democratic values and democratic ideas throughout the world, we must live as we preach. I am a strong believer in oversight, and I want to underline that it does not mean micromanagement. The Constitutional Committee of the Parliament of Sweden is always chaired by a member of the opposition, which we believe, enhances the oversight mechanism and power of our Parliament. Recently, I chaired the hearings on the then government's action, or lack of action, in the aftermath of the Tsunami catastrophe in Thailand, where hundreds of Swedes died. The hearings further strengthened my belief in and support for parliamentary oversight. OSCE would be a stronger and more efficient organization if we parliamentarians had more and better insight into its work.

Election observation is an important part of OSCE's mandate. Since 1993, the OSCE PA has conducted close to 90 election observation missions with the participation of over 2,000 parliamentarians. Here, I would like to take the opportunity to encourage the members of the U.S. Congress to participate as much as possible in these observation missions.

Election observation is important because it helps build democracy. It is important that we have high standards that are the same for all states, East or West of Vienna, and that double standards are never acceptable. The leadership and presence of parliamentary observers at elections during transitional periods emphasizes the importance of legislatures as institutions that must provide a balance to executive authority. As parliamentarians are themselves directly elected public officials,

their observations are of great value to the public and to the voters, as well as to local and international media.

As stated in the Assembly's Brussels Declaration (article 88), approved unanimously, of the Parliamentary Assembly's role in OSCE election observation missions:

“(It) Urges the Parliamentary Assembly to continue to provide political leadership to the OSCE Election Observation Missions, with the technical, logistical and long-term observer support of ODIHR respecting the Co-operation Agreement and, if possible, reinforcing it.”

I can assure you that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has faithfully observed the letter and the spirit of the Cooperation Agreement in every election observation mission since 1997. Regrettably, OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has not done so in spite of our best efforts and with the strong support from the Spanish OSCE Chairmanship led by Spain's Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos. We need to find a solution to this issue.

So far, this year, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has participated in and led four election observation missions: Serbia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. On December 2, elections to the Russian State Duma will take place. The OSCE has not yet been invited, but we hope and expect that we will be. In this context, I am pleased that Poland changed its mind and invited OSCE observers to the Polish elections on October 21. By signing the Copenhagen Document from 1990, all OSCE participating States have agreed that the presence of observers can enhance the electoral process. Indeed, this process has proven so important in the continued development of democracy within the OSCE area and it is vital that the OSCE is allowed to continue this important work.

Let me conclude by once again thanking the U.S. Helsinki Commission for this opportunity to appear before you and discuss the vital issues of our day.

I look forward to your questions.
Thank you!