

“Combatting Corruption in Bosnia”
Rep. Chris Smith, Chairman
Wednesday, May 25, 2016

Welcome to our witnesses and to everyone joining us this afternoon. Today we will learn about the nature, causes, and extent of corruption in Bosnia – and we will weigh solutions to the problem. We will look at efforts by the United States and the international community, along with civil society, to combat corruption.

I’d like to begin by making clear that corruption is not unique to Bosnia nor worse in Bosnia than in some neighboring countries. We are here to talk about Bosnia not to single it out for criticism. Not at all. We are here because, as a result of the Bosnian conflict, the Srebrenica genocide, and the Dayton Accords the United States has a special responsibility to this country. We want to help it move forward, for example into full NATO integration.

Twenty years ago, Bosnia was in the first and most difficult phases of its recovery and reconciliation following the brutal and genocidal conflict that began in 1992 and ended in 1995 with outside intervention under U.S. leadership culminating in the Dayton Peace Accords. The country was devastated, and its people traumatized by conflict marked by the ethnic cleansing of villages, the shelling of cities and numerous other crimes, including the genocide at Srebrenica.

At that time the Helsinki Commission was deeply engaged in promoting solutions for Bosnia. Over the years I have chaired 9 hearings on Bosnia – most of them focusing on ending the tragic conflict, preventing genocide, and on justice and accountability for the terrible crimes committed during those years.

Today, many of the physical scars of that period are gone, but Bosnia still struggles with sharp ethnic divisions, and its progress in the past decade has been stymied by a very high level of official corruption. Many officials have focused on helping themselves to the privileges and opportunities that come with that power.

The people of Bosnia, who have suffered so much since 1992, deserve better than this.

I'd like to ask our witnesses to address two issues related to corruption.

First, several weeks ago I met with Munira Subasic from the Association of "Mothers' Action of the Srebrenica and Zepa Enclaves." Munira had herself lost her husband, son and 20 other members of her family at Srebrenica in July 1995. Her frustration today regards the seeming impunity of hundreds of people – an estimated 850 – implicated in violations of international humanitarian law during the war, who had their cases transferred from the international tribunal to the Bosnian courts. To this day, these cases have not been processed – not one of them - which seems outrageous on the face of it.

I would like to know to what extent corruption in law enforcement and the judicial system protects possible war criminals from facing justice. Also – might the same people implicated in horrible crimes during the war years today be part of the corruption problem?

Second, trafficking in persons remains an ongoing problem throughout the Balkans, including Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the immediate post-war period, the heavy international presence in Bosnia generated a tremendous and as yet largely

unpunished demand for trafficked women as part of the sex trade. The suppliers were as blatant as they were aggressive in their criminal enterprise. Measures were eventually taken in response, and Bosnia's record improved markedly until recent years when the trend has been generally downward.

Trafficking is a crime that takes organization, but it can be most successful in countries vulnerable to corruption. I would therefore like to know the extent to which our witnesses feel Bosnia's record in regard to trafficking in persons is linked to its record in regard to corruption.