

U.S. COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

BRIEFING: "MOLDOVA AT THE CROSSROADS"

SEPTEMBER 22, 2016

DRAFT OPENING STATEMENT

CONGRESSMAN JOSEPH R. PITTS

(On behalf of Chairman Chris Smith),

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the Helsinki Commission's briefing on "Moldova at the Crossroads."

This briefing marks the latest in a series of events held in recent years by the Commission on challenges facing Moldova. The Commission has worked hard to keep informed on developments there and drive U.S. policy towards greater effectiveness.

In 2012, Congressman David Price and I established the Moldova Caucus to act as yet another entity to augment our government's foreign policy with respect to the Republic. This caucus helped accelerate collaboration between Moldova's government and Members of Congress, and it did so at a critical juncture.

As Moldova prepares for presidential elections scheduled for October 30, the country is at a yet another crossroads. While it seeks to overcome significant internal challenges, Moldova also remains squarely in the crosshairs of Russian destabilization efforts intended to maintain Moscow's influence and prevent closer relations between Moldova and the West.

This briefing is intended to explore several issues, including:

- Russia's efforts and continued threats to Moldovan territorial integrity and sovereignty;
- Russian destabilizing actions, including disinformation campaigns, an economic blockade, and threatening rhetoric;
- and the roles of the Moldovan government and external actors, including the U.S., the EU, and the OSCE, in addressing Moldovan vulnerabilities.

Let me emphasize that Moldova remains a key concern not only for the Helsinki Commission but also for Congress as a whole. I was proud to sponsor a Resolution on Moldova, House Resolution 562, passed by the House in July of 2014. Among other things, the resolution:

- Reaffirmed that it is U.S. policy to support the Republic of Moldova's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity;
- called upon the Government of Russia to withdraw its military forces from Moldova, refrain from economic threats, and cease supporting separatist movements;
- and affirmed that lasting stability and security in Europe is a key U.S. priority that can only be achieved if the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all European countries is respected.

These principles – sovereignty, territorial integrity and the like – are the cornerstones of the Helsinki Final Act, commitments monitored on a continuing basis by the Helsinki Commission.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm afraid that many of the challenges my resolution sought to address, challenges that we have learned about through past Commission hearings and briefings on Moldova, are unfortunately still with us today.

Before turning the briefing over to Alex Tiersky from the Helsinki Commission to moderate the discussion, let me close by saying a few words about the Commission itself.

I was first appointed to serve as a member of the Helsinki Commission in 1999. In that time, the Commission has given me a platform to promote and defend core U.S. values and interests on issues ranging from religious freedom in Russia to combatting child pornography. As a Commissioner, I have traveled with fellow Members of the House and Senate abroad to meet with our counterparts from the more than 50 OSCE nations to ensure each country is pushed to fully uphold its commitments, including the defense of fundamental human rights.

The Commission often draws attention to issues and countries that are not always in the Washington, DC spotlight, but are nevertheless of crucial importance to the United States. The subject of today's hearing is a case in point. While Georgia and Ukraine – two countries in similar circumstances – rightly get a lot of attention in Washington, the Commission will continue to make sure that Moldova's challenges also get the attention they deserve.

I'd therefore like to thank Ambassador Hill and Mr. Rojansky for once again offering their expertise to the Helsinki Commission. It is only through the support of exceptional individuals like our speakers today that the Commission can ensure its work is well-informed, relevant, and effective.

Thank you for being here.

Over to you, Alex.