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Prepared Statement
U.S. Helsinki Commission Hearing
on
“U.S. Priorities for Engagement at the OSCE”
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Introduction

Senator Cardin, Members of the commission: Thank you very much for inviting me to address the commission today on U.S. priorities for engagement at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). I know it took some effort to arrange the time for this hearing, and I thank you for your flexibility. The Department and the commission have a long history of working together here in Washington and at the OSCE in Vienna. This sends a clear message to friends and foes alike of the unwavering and bipartisan U.S. commitment to the OSCE. We also wish to applaud the Commissioners’ principled and creative contributions to our work and the efforts of the Parliamentary Assembly, which strengthen all three OSCE dimensions of security.

Summary of the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting

To begin, I want to make one point very clear: I believe – and I think my predecessors would say the same – the OSCE plays a unique role in the foreign relations of the United States with Europe, Canada, and Central Asia. This is an organization where the United States speaks directly with democratic friends and Allies, as well as with countries that demonstrably do not share our values. At OSCE we deliver our message to all, undiluted. We underscore the OSCE’s comprehensive concept of security and the importance of implementing all commitments in all three dimensions – politico-military, economic/environmental, and human.

The OSCE just concluded its 27th Ministerial Council meeting. It was scheduled to be held this year in Tirana, but our Albanian chair in office, PM Edi Rama, rightly chose to hold the meeting virtually due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

outbreak. Deputy Secretary of State Biegun's intervention at the Ministerial Council meeting highlighted U.S. priorities at the OSCE:

- calling out Moscow's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and pushing Russia to implement its Minsk commitments and end its occupation of Crimea,
- raising our concerns over Russia's recent efforts to clamp down on freedom of expression and freedom of the press,
- calling for Belarusian authorities to honor their human rights obligations and to implement the recommendations of the Moscow Mechanism report,
- reaffirming the U.S. position for Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the Minsk Group process, and
- calling on participating States to respect the rule of law and fulfill their obligations under international law and abide by their OSCE commitments.

It's always difficult to reach consensus in an organization with 57 participating states; however, we made substantial progress on a number of key issues at this Ministerial. Notably, we were able to reach consensus on decisions on combatting transnational organized crime, combatting corruption through digitalization and increased transparency, and preventing and eradicating torture, as well as a statement on Moldova. Perhaps most significantly, it was critical at this Ministerial for participating States to reach consensus on new leadership, in particular the Secretary General. Our new Secretary General, Helga Schmid, has been a partner of successive U.S. Administrations and will be a dynamic leader of the organization at time when OSCE's foundational principles are more relevant than ever. While we made progress on these and other issues, deep differences, notably between Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia and most others, continue to be an obstacle for more concrete and substantive gains.

In the coming year, we hope Russia will collaborate with us constructively on an updated Vienna Document to begin to rebuild military transparency in Europe. We believe OSCE is the right forum for nations to identify the impacts of the pandemic in all three dimensions and share best practices as we seek to recover. We want to build on discussion in 2020 that led to a landmark decision on environmental issues that commits us to stop trafficking in natural resources and wildlife. Azerbaijan alone blocked that decision.

We must press governments to uphold their human dimension commitments, amplify independent voices of civil society, and hold a Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in 2021 where governments are called to account for their actions. Like Ambassador Gilmore, I was disappointed the 57 failed to reach

consensus on a decision to address Trafficking in Persons in situations of emergency, a concern the commission and its staff were instrumental in advancing. The decision on prohibition of the use of torture is the product of hard negotiating to ensure it applies universally, in all circumstances. On this we had outstanding assistance from multiple agencies as we helped to shape a meaningful text.

Priorities for the OSCE

At the Ministerial, an overwhelming number of participating States joined in defending Helsinki Final Act principles, insisting on the implementation of OSCE commitments, and recognizing OSCE's important work in Vienna and in the field in all dimensions of security. As was the case 45 years ago when the Helsinki Final Act was adopted, so it remains today: Achieving lasting security and prosperity in the OSCE region depends on upholding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States as well as respect for the human rights of all. Looking beyond the Ministerial, let me share some of our key lines of effort:

- We want the OSCE to continue to focus on Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and purported annexation of Crimea. Since 2014, the conflict has killed over 13,000 Ukrainian citizens and driven more than a million from their homes. We continue to push this issue strongly, and, in fact, our Mission to the OSCE delivers a statement on the subject of Russia's aggression and violation of Ukraine's sovereignty in every single meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council.
- We want the OSCE to increase its engagement on the ongoing crisis and violent crackdown in Belarus. We were one of the invoking states of the Moscow Mechanism on September 17, which culminated in the November 5 release of a detailed, damning report on the Belarusian authorities' violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms of its citizens before, during, and after the August 9 presidential election.
- We will push back against the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s malign influence across the OSCE region and its increasingly aggressive economic, military, and political actions and policies, which pose serious risks to the security and prosperity of the OSCE region.
- The OSCE must help us to identify the challenges posed in all three dimensions by the coronavirus. Strengthening democratic governance and the institutions that comprise a resilient civil society must be a priority of the

global response to COVID-19. We will shine a light on other costs that are the result of deliberate actions taken by some states to use the pandemic as a pretext for repressing civil society and independent media.

- We know challenges in the human dimension are growing. We will spotlight the increasing restrictions on the online and offline exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We will strongly press for the release of political prisoners and detainees in the region; their number is increasing. Anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, anti-Roma racism and other forms of hatred also continue to rise across the region. Members of racial, ethnic and religious minorities and other vulnerable populations, such as LGBTI individuals, are targets of discrimination and prejudice.
- We will continue to condemn and combat all manifestations of intolerance and support the efforts of ODIHR and other OSCE institutions to those ends. Given the negative trends for human rights, **it is essential that the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting – cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic – takes place in 2021**, whether in person – as we all hope – or virtual.
- We will keep Europe’s protracted conflicts (in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict) high on the OSCE agenda. We will continue to use the Minsk Group Co-Chairs to find a just and lasting resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The cessation of the fighting is only the first step. Any enduring solution must be based on the principles in the Helsinki Final Act. The OSCE also needs to continue efforts to reduce tensions in the Western Balkans.
- We want the OSCE to focus on hybrid threats that are destabilizing an already tense security environment. Russia employs hybrid tactics globally, and nowhere more regularly than in the OSCE neighborhood, as we have seen with its disinformation campaigns and efforts to create frozen conflicts. Beijing makes overseas investments and deploys its United Front to undermine societies and breed dependence. At OSCE we must continue to call out malign activity and provide a venue to discuss building resilience to counter and deter those threats.
- We want the OSCE to advance efforts on border security, counterterrorism, and trafficking. We will work within the institution to highlight the nexus

between trafficking of key natural resources and security, including the connection between the illegal exploitation of and trade in wildlife, timber, fish, precious metals, and gemstones, and corruption and transnational organized criminal networks.

- Finally, we would like to see the OSCE strengthen military security and transparency in the OSCE region. The United States will assume the Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC) chair on January 4, 2021, which is a key opportunity to project geostrategic leadership and advance political-military priorities. We will use our chairmanship to advance discussion of Vienna Document (VDOC) modernization, an important step for conventional arms control, and counter Russian propaganda about NATO's enhanced Forward Presence; zero-in on hybrid threats; promote the Women, Peace and Security agenda; highlight challenges with man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS); and address security issues affecting Central Asia.

Senator Cardin, Members of the Commission, thank you again for the opportunity to be here with you today. I am proud of the work we do advancing U.S. priorities at the OSCE and stand ready to take your questions on these important efforts.