



OPENING STATEMENT

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Ranking Member – House

Hearing on “Political Pluralism in the OSCE Mediterranean Partners?”

July 9, 2014
(as prepared for delivery)

Distinguished guests, I also wish to welcome you and I thank my friend Chairman Cardin for convening this U.S. Helsinki Commission hearing on “Political Pluralism in the OSCE Mediterranean Partners?” During my service as OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs, I spent a number of years traveling among all of our Mediterranean Partners on behalf of several different OSCE PA presidents. Even before the Arab Awakening, I sought to empower the voices of the disenfranchised in the region and press

those who were in power to let pluralism flourish. From Rabat to Cairo, Algiers to Amman, I observed a common thirst for meaningful civic engagement. The popular uprisings since the end of 2010 have shown the need for capacity development among the youthful population of the region and made engagement with the OSCE more functional than it has ever been.

I worked in 2009 to convene parliamentarians and experts from throughout the Partners in Washington for a seminar¹ to reinvigorate what had been a diminishing partnership. This seminar yielded key recommendations that prompted efforts to add value to the partnership. This event also

¹ U.S. Helsinki Commission Seminar on OSCE Mediterranean Partner Engagement: http://csce.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=ContentRecords.ViewDetail&ContentRecord_id=467&Region_id=0&Issue_id=0&ContentType=G&ContentRecordType=G&CFID=24070648&CFTOKEN=5dfcd53f8cbeca93-AE1814C2-0A22-5187-EE2C4FC7CB3E80D5

encouraged greater ownership of affiliated projects and initiatives by our friends from Partner States, so that our collective efforts would be meaningful to them. That same year was the last time that the OSCE convened its annual Mediterranean Conference in a Partner State. Political turmoil, instability and a lack of support for Israel's contribution to the partnership has kept some Partners from taking a leadership role in bringing the conference back to the Southern shore of the Mediterranean. We must change that. We must show that meaningful exchange will only come from dialogue of equally invested partners.

Mediterranean Partner States are beginning to come to the table and invest in the OSCE Partnership Fund.

Morocco and Tunisia have even requested legal reviews for their structural reforms from the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). As I had recommended for years, investments are underway for youth exchanges and greater contributions from civil society in the region to OSCE events. I applaud these efforts and especially look to our expert panel to remark on how we can do better; acknowledging the demographic trends and political realities.

I would be remiss not to mention the violent conflicts in Iraq and Syria, which have displaced millions and vastly changed the political landscape of the region. We are on a dark trajectory if we do not strategically invest in positive

civic engagement and much needed educational resources for those vulnerable populations. As I have said, time and time again, if we do not engage those populations, we will see them again in another form. And their demands will not be met through peaceful political channels.

I look forward to thoughts from our panelists on the role of the United States and the international community in affirming the aspirations of those who took to the streets demanding responsive government and basic civil liberties. Thank you for sharing your expertise with us.