

Statement of Chairman Sam Brownback Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

On behalf of my colleagues on the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I am pleased to welcome Minister De Gucht to our hearing today in his capacity as Chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. We appreciate this opportunity to hear your assessment of developments in the OSCE region, and beyond, as we partner to uphold human dignity and promote democracy.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Commission. Our mission is to monitor the progress of the 56 participating States of the OSCE in their implementation of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. I know that my fellow Commissioners and I, as well as our able Commission staff, take seriously our mandate to monitor implementation of all of the commitments—agreed by all of OSCE countries—in the security, economic, and human dimensions. The OSCE's comprehensive approach to security makes it well-suited to address pressing issues facing us today, including human trafficking, corruption, and terrorism.

The OSCE has been a resource for governments desiring change and a valuable voice in speaking out against human rights abuses. But the institution continues to be challenged by the presence of regimes that resort to repression to remain in power. Some participating States simply do not abide by the promises they made in joining the organization. Regrettably, trends in several states do not give rise to optimism. In the face of this reality, we can either lower the bar or redouble our efforts to foster change.

The former would be tantamount to an abandonment of the very principles we share on paper, if not in reality. While some seek to weaken our resolve, we must press on and not lose sight of our objective. Indeed, the OSCE continues to provide a comprehensive framework for progress. The participating States must supply the political will to make the promise of progress a reality.

The current situation in Central Asia and the Caucasus is one example of this promise and I am optimistic that the countries of that region can overcome the crippling legacy of communism and seek a brighter future. I know that I, and my fellow Commissioners are keenly interested in the development of democracy in this area. Representative Smith has introduced the Central Asia Democracy Act and I introduced the Silk Road Strategy Act of 2006—both seeking to foster the development of democracy, the rule of law and greater respect for human rights.

I believe we need to take a comprehensive approach to the region, engaging on security, economic development, democratic governance and human rights. The Silk Road Strategy Act targets the key issues that U.S. policymakers must address in our effort to establish solid, long-lasting relationships with the countries of the Silk Road. The bill recognizes that genuine and lasting progress cannot be imposed, but can result from partnership involving governments, civil society and organizations like the OSCE.

While there has been tremendous progress in the 15 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, I see some worrying trends in the region. I think these are probably the same issues on your mind as well, Mr. De Gucht. Russia, a country with an increasingly ambiguous rights record, has been all too willing to coddle dictators as evidenced by President Putin's hosting of Mr. Karimov on the eve of the anniversary of the bloody massacre at Andijon. Russia continues to maintain close ties with Lukashenka in Belarus—despite his being ostracized by the European Union and the United States, among others. I am also troubled by developments in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization – a collection of largely authoritarian and anti-democratic regimes with little tolerance for human rights.

Mr. Minister, I am looking forward to hearing your thoughts on these and other issues that you would like to share with us. Once again, thank you for joining us and we look forward to your insights.