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“The Western Balkans: Challenges for U.S and European Engagement”
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to everyone here this afternoon.

Mr. Chairman, one of the challenges facing U.S. engagement in the Balkans has always been to engage the region in the real day-to-day problems of the people who live there—problems that have so much to do with human rights and democracy—rather than give in to the temptation to see the Balkans only as a minor stage for broader military and diplomatic issues like European and Atlantic integration, the war on terrorism, and Russian expansionism.

Mr. Chairman, I have been following this region closely for many years, 12 of them as Chair or Co-Chair of this Commission, during the tragic years of the Bosnia and Kosovo wars. At that time, our government and others in Europe had to bear some responsibility for enabling the Serbian genocide against Bosnian Muslims by refusing to lift the arms embargo. It is to the credit of this Commission that several of us were among the most active voices in favor of lifting that embargo. Sadly, President Clinton did not listen to us, and to others like Bob Dole, until it was too late for the Muslims of Srebrenica. One of the lessons of the years since the wars ended is that the best way to make regional progress in the war on terrorism and integrate the Balkan countries into European and Atlantic structures will be *to help these countries improve their human rights records and consolidate their democracies.*

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to say a few words about Bosnia, one of the countries in which the U.S. has been most involved. In Bosnia, the priority remains constitutional reform. In 1995 the Dayton Agreement was a successful formula for stopping a war—but nobody dreamed that it could become a mid- or long-term constitution for Bosnia. But now, 14 years later, Bosnia is still governed according to Dayton, which allows small minorities to exercise a veto over legislative and executive action. I am afraid that allowing Bosnia to hang in this “Dayton limbo” is what is exacerbating ethnic and religious tensions, and encouraging separatists and extremists in their dream of dividing Bosnia. I strongly believe, with the great majority of Bosnians, that the country can't safely stay where it is, but has to move forward to become a one-person, one-vote democracy. Then it will be able to take up the project of joining the EU and NATO.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing on the Balkans, a region where the Commission has a long record of activity on behalf of human rights.