



THE OSCE AND THE NEED FOR CHANGE

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I am very happy and deeply honoured to appear here today before the Helsinki Commission of the U.S. Congress. I would like to thank the members of the Commission for inviting me, in particular the Commission's Chairman and Vice President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Senator Benjamin Cardin, as well as the Commission's Co-Chairman, Congressman Alcee L. Hastings. I'm proud to follow in the footsteps of Congressman Hastings, who served as President of the OSCE PA for two years, and who now continues to lead the Assembly's work on Mediterranean issues.

I would also, with great pleasure, like to note the fact that I am accompanied here today by Spencer Oliver, the Assembly's Secretary General since its founding, and who was the first Staff Director of the Helsinki Commission.

The work of the Helsinki Commission and the participation of the United States in the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly have been, and continue to be, invaluable to our organization. The OSCE is the only regional organization in which North America, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Europe are all members. That makes it not only unique but also absolutely indispensable. It is vital that we continue to strengthen the important transatlantic link in order for the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly to meet the numerous challenges in the OSCE area.

The robust participation of Members of the Congress and Senate in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's activities has been critical to the success of the Assembly throughout the years. Your active participation in our meetings provides important opportunities for parliamentarians, particularly from the former Soviet Union, to interact with their parliamentary colleagues from this side of the Atlantic. Understanding the extra travel burden placed upon you to come to Europe, your active participation in OSCE PA events is recognized and appreciated.

Almost two years have gone by since I was honoured at the Seventeenth Annual Session in Astana, Kazakhstan by being elected President of the OSCE Assembly. And last year, in Vilnius, Lithuania, I was honoured again by the renewed confidence from my colleagues in the Assembly. I ran for the office of President because I believe deeply in this organization. My focus has been on democratization and to always remember to be loyal to the spirit of Helsinki. I have tried to find a balance for the activities of the Organization between the "East and West of Vienna." I have striven to ensure full respect for the principles of the OSCE in an inclusive, not exclusive, manner, involving all participating States in the OSCE and its Assembly. And I have striven to involve as

many members as possible in the work of the Assembly – both during our meetings and out in the field.

These two years have brought positive as well as negative developments. My biggest disappointment has been the war between two participating OSCE States, Russia and Georgia, and the closing of the OSCE Mission in Georgia. The unrest in Kyrgyzstan has also been most worrisome, and the OSCE needs to lend all its efforts, expertise and knowledge to try to help Kyrgyzstan overcome the present crisis and return to the path towards an improved democracy.

I have spent much of my two years trying to encourage increased participation from the members of our Parliamentary Assembly in Central Asia. Kazakhstan is presently setting a high standard by its high participation. But, unfortunately, we have not managed to persuade Uzbekistan to start participating in our Assembly again, as it once did, and I am sad to see the recent decreasing participation by parliamentarians from Turkmenistan – I sincerely hope that this changes in the near future. I am also disappointed that the OSCE efforts on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including those by our President Emeritus and Special Representative Goran Lennmarker have not yet born fruit. I agree with him that we have a golden opportunity to reach an agreement in this old and stubborn conflict, and we need to continue in our efforts.

On the positive side, I would like to mention the peaceful transition of power in Ukraine after two rounds of impressively democratic elections, and the positive political development in Moldova after last year's elections, in spite of the intransigence of the Transnistrian issue. And in the Balkans, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, their political situations are encouraging. Our parliamentarians, through observation missions, the work of our special representatives and the special teams such as the one on Moldova, have all played important contributory roles here.

During my time as President, it has also been important for me to continue the Parliamentary Assembly's role as a forum for debate on the most urgent issues of our time. And we have done so by focusing important discussions on the conflict in Georgia, European security architecture, climate change, the war in Afghanistan, and the crisis in Kyrgyzstan.

As an integral part of the OSCE, the Parliamentary Assembly must be involved on many fronts – contributing to the dialogue, assisting the OSCE in trying to solve conflicts and preventing new ones from erupting; increasing the respect for human rights; fighting against human trafficking; and strengthening OSCE election observation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My two years as President have made it even more clear that the OSCE is in need of revival. While I remain a strong believer in the work of the Organization, much of the flexibility, which was one of the main advantages of the OSCE, has been lost – the bureaucracy in Vienna is stifling the organization. Both dialogue and our work in the field suffer as a result.

The OSCE's flexibility has been its strongest asset, but unfortunately, I have noticed an increasing tendency for OSCE activities to get bogged down in bureaucracy and in the cumbersome decision-making process in Vienna. I am concerned with the lack of political relevance of the OSCE, which is largely due to the current decision-making processes. Our diplomats go through a ritual of routine decisions on purely administrative issues such as agreeing on dates of conferences for annual meetings – all of which are subject to a veto by any country. This opens up a serious potential for abuse of power, and given that the consultations take place in secret, we have virtually no way of holding our diplomats to account.

The weekly Permanent Council meeting in Vienna in which ambassadors read out pre-written statements instead of holding an actual debate on a real and specific topic is the opposite of constructive dialogue. Even these fully scripted meetings take place without any press or public access.

Given this situation, it is perhaps not surprising that there is a lack of high-level political interest in the OSCE. It has been over ten years since a summit was held. In few countries, if any, the OSCE is seen as a priority. Any organization will continue on 'autopilot' unless political leadership takes an interest to provide real guidance.

As President, I have worked to try to raise awareness of this problem, but the problem persists. The Parliamentary Assembly can and should continue to play a role in fighting this, but it is an uphill battle – immobility is a strong force.

We also do not make any friends in Vienna by raising these issues publicly. However, we must continue to criticise the fact that all decisions happen by consensus and behind closed doors. This lack of transparency means that we have no evidence of how, or WHETHER, things actually work in Vienna.

At the very least, I am sceptical that they work the way they should. With no accountability, the relevance of OSCE decisions has sharply declined. Decisions about key political issues often do not even reach the table in the OSCE, because there is the fear that one delegation might object. The courage to make bold decisions, demonstrated so well by our leaders in 1975, has been lost in the OSCE's secrecy.

The OSCE's field missions, one of its strongest assets, are also being weakened. Already in 2005 during our Colloquium on the Future of the OSCE here in Washington, DC, we pointed to the danger of micromanagement of field work. Having personally visited almost every field mission, I have seen a draining of resources from the field towards the Secretariat headquarters in Vienna. Simply put, Vienna is becoming fat at their expense, and the OSCE's ability to maintain its excellent and proven field work is under threat.

Members of parliaments pass laws, approve national budgets and taxes, and scrutinize governments. Parliaments and parliamentarians also provide valuable assistance to international co-operation and development. Parliamentary oversight and accountability in international organizations – including the OSCE – is essential and oversight mechanisms need to be built in to the system. For example, during our most recent Vilnius Annual Session, the OSCE PA called for the Parliamentary Assembly to be given an oversight role in relation to the OSCE budget and for confirmation by the Assembly of the OSCE Secretary General, once nominated.

I will continue to push for greater transparency in the OSCE. There is a democratic deficit that remains to be addressed. The Helsinki process was about opening up societies and about dialogue. The secrecy with which the Permanent Council conducts its work is not in line with the spirit of Helsinki.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We also need to re-think the question -- what is the added value of the OSCE? Where can we genuinely make a difference?

In the field of election observation, the OSCE has demonstrated its leading expertise, and the

advantage of the political expertise of parliamentarians was clearly recognised in the 1997 Co-operation Agreement governing relations between the Parliamentary Assembly and the ODIHR (Organization for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights). While we have had problems in implementing this Agreement, it is an important agreement that should be upheld and to which the Assembly has always made a point of adhering.

Election observation is the most visible and politically relevant activity that the OSCE conducts. It is therefore also very sensitive, which makes the political judgement of parliamentarians absolutely crucial. At times, there have been attempts to erode the independence of OSCE election observation; leadership by parliamentarians who have personal legitimacy and are fully independent of the OSCE budget and bureaucracy is clearly the best way to maintain credible and independent observation.

The OSCE should also be a forum for exchanges and dialogue – it can be a place for those in transition to learn from the experiences of others. I believe that the OSCE PA's observation of the recent parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom was an excellent example of this possibility. Assembly members from participating States east of Vienna came to the UK to study the British system. There is pedagogy inherent in meetings and discussions that I have personally noted within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I am very pleased that OSCE missions similarly support international exchanges to this end.

Also in terms of field work, the OSCE's network in many of the countries where we have missions is unequalled. We do not have the resources of the EU or the UN, but the expertise and deep local knowledge exist. We must build on and solidify this through improved working conditions: lowering the reliance on secondments and changing or eliminating staff term limits. We must seek to avoid that we, as now, regularly lose our experts to other organizations. Everybody loses in this scenario – most notably the people in the countries in which the OSCE is working.

Unfortunately, as I noted, the recent trend has been to divert resources away from the field missions towards headquarters, and this simply must be reversed. The OSCE's most important work is done in the field. The need for work by our missions is as large as ever, and we cannot allow a further stripping of their already slim resources.

What then is the future for the OSCE?

When the Helsinki Final Act was signed in 1975, we had two major powers involved in a Cold War. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, we have a new situation where future security will have to take greater consideration of new powers and realities.

- The recent Trans-Asian Parliamentary Forum in Almaty, organized jointly by the OSCE PA and the Parliament of Kazakhstan, included parliamentarians from Pakistan and Afghanistan, and it clearly demonstrated the advantage of greater inclusion in our discussions.
- The Mediterranean partner States are also part of our increased focus, and we must continue to work hard to bring the countries around the Mediterranean closer to us and engage them in the important discussions of our times. As the Assembly's Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs, Congressman Hastings has continued to lead Assembly efforts in this regard – and I believe he is the only President of the Assembly to have visited all Mediterranean partner States. I was pleased to personally participate in a very successful seminar on this topic that he organised here in Washington last summer.

Last year we commemorated the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The CSCE has certainly made a major contribution to ending the Cold War. But there is still too much old East-West thinking in the minds of many. We have to revive the spirit of Helsinki.

It seems that the Corfu Process, started last year, has at least seen some good will in this direction. It effectively asks the question: 'where is the OSCE heading?' I hope that the result will be a stronger political role that enables the Organization to make a greater impact and to deal more effectively with the prevention and the resolution of conflicts. But for this to be the case, the OSCE will need to change. The reciting of dry statements by our diplomats in Vienna will have to be replaced by a genuine dialogue on political issues. Much greater transparency will be needed both in the dialogue that takes place, to provide credibility to the discussions, and in the Secretariat, to ensure that our resources are well utilised in the field.

The Parliamentary Assembly has regularly encouraged an increase in high-level political dialogue on the OSCE. I believe that 2010 – as both the 35th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the 20th anniversary of the Charter of Paris – is the appropriate moment to reinvigorate the OSCE through the convening of an OSCE Summit.

Thank you.