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“U.S. Foreign Policy and the OSCE: From Astana to Vilnius”**

Introduction

Chairman Smith, Co-Chairman Cardin, Members of the Commission: Thank you very much for inviting me here today to discuss our agenda for the OSCE. Let me also take this opportunity to thank the excellent Helsinki Commission staff members who have worked long, hard, and in cooperation with their State colleagues to safeguard the principles and commitments of the OSCE, and to hold participating States to account.

I will focus my remarks today on the OSCE in the aftermath of the December, 2010 Astana Summit. I will begin by looking at our core foreign policy goals for the OSCE, reviewing the achievements of Astana and looking forward to the OSCE’s Ministerial meeting in Vilnius this December.

OSCE: Shared Values, Inconsistent Implementation

Nowhere does the United States have better or more valuable partners than in Europe. The U.S. and Europe share common values, our economies are intertwined, and our militaries work together to address common security challenges. U.S. bilateral engagement with our European partners is complemented by our work together in key multilateral regional institutions. Our engagement with NATO Allies – including operational military cooperation – on the full gamut of security issues has no equivalent anywhere else in the world. Through the OSCE we are able to engage on such U.S. priorities as advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms, building democratic institutions in the Western Balkans, combating trafficking in persons, as well as North Africa and Afghanistan, to name just a few. In this age of a tight budget and many demands, multilateral approaches often present a more effective alternative to unilateral engagement.

The OSCE was founded on the principle of comprehensive security, that is, the conviction that true security has an economic and environmental dimension and a human dimension, in addition to the political-military dimension. As the world’s

largest regional security organization with membership that stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok, with partners in Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, the OSCE has unmatched scope to advance this concept and strengthen security across all three dimensions and increasingly beyond the OSCE region itself.

Today the principles and commitments enshrined in the founding document of the OSCE – the Helsinki Final Act – are facing serious challenges from both inside and outside the organization. From within, there is uneven application of the Helsinki principles, and I regret to say that there are OSCE participating States where journalists can find it too dangerous to report the news, where political activists are beaten and incarcerated, where religious and minority groups, such as the Roma, continue to face persecution, and where economic growth is stifled by endemic corruption. Regional crises and transnational threats are proliferating. Efforts to resolve the protracted conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, and Nagorno-Karabakh continue to face frustrating obstacles. The OSCE's inability to reach consensus on ways to address these issues is increasingly identified by critics as evidence of the organization's ineffectiveness.

This Commission – and your able staff – know well the reasons why OSCE decision-making is complicated and how easy it is for one nation to use the organization's consensus rule to prevent timely and effective action in a situation of crisis. Russia's determination to limit the role of OSCE in Georgia, for example, has diminished possibilities for international engagement in this region where transparency and confidence-building are sorely needed.

Problems like these make headlines, but they offer only a partial picture of the role OSCE plays in Europe today. The OSCE has deepened and strengthened European and Eurasian security through initiatives to enhance rule of law, provide for free and fair elections, develop an independent media, respect the rights of minority groups, and improve the ability of citizens to exercise their fundamental freedoms. The OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE's field missions have been at the forefront in assisting OSCE participating States to strengthen their democracy and thereby their security.

In concert with those bodies, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the High Commissioner for National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the Chairmanship's Special Representatives on Tolerance and Gender Issues make for a powerful set of instruments to help participating States live up to their commitments and thus bring security to the region.

The OSCE has made tremendous strides toward building a zone of prosperity and stability that stretches from western Canada to the Russian Far East. Although it is at times stymied by a lack of sustained political will and attempts by some participating States to constrain its flexibility, the OSCE nonetheless remains uniquely positioned to build confidence, promote good governance, and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe and Eurasia.

Moving Forward from Astana

At the Astana Summit last December – the first OSCE Summit in eleven years – the 56 participating States issued the Astana Commemorative Declaration – a strong reaffirmation of the Helsinki principles and commitments and the entire OSCE acquis. This included the first-ever explicit affirmation by the former Soviet states of the declaration originally made in the OSCE’s 1991 Moscow Document that makes human rights conditions in individual OSCE participating States matters of “direct and legitimate concern” to all of them. The final document also tasked future OSCE Chairmanships to build on efforts last year to develop an action plan to address a range of common challenges that notably include the protracted conflicts, conflict prevention and crisis response, counter-narcotics, counterterrorism, issues facing media freedom, anti-Semitism, treatment of minorities such as the Roma and Sinti, and trafficking in persons to name a few.

The Astana Summit also underscored the vital role that civil society plays in the OSCE region, as numerous human rights activists from some of the OSCE region’s most embattled corners engaged constructively with government delegations and provided input to the work of the Summit. With strong U.S. support, NGOs and civil society representatives participated in the final three days of the Human Dimension portion of the Review Conference preceding the Summit, as well as in a civil society forum and an independently organized parallel NGO conference. Secretary Clinton also held a vibrant, standing-room only town hall event at Eurasian University with NGO and civil society representatives.

The Astana Summit opened a new chapter for the OSCE. It provided renewed impetus for action to make the OSCE space – including the Central Asian space – even more democratic, prosperous, and secure for our citizens. The Administration has remained deeply engaged in the work of the OSCE across all three dimensions. We are seeking ways to sustain the momentum that was generated – in both government and civil society networks – by the Astana Summit.

Lithuania's Chairmanship

In 2010 and 2011, crises in Belarus and Kyrgyzstan demonstrated the ongoing need for the OSCE to hold its membership to the highest standards of human rights performance and comprehensive security. The tragic case in Russia of Sergey Magnitsky, a lawyer who died in pre-trial detention, is most illustrative of the problems facing the judiciaries of too many member states, and a problem that we are seeking to address in close consultation with Senator Cardin and others on this committee.

We will continue to press for greater implementation of OSCE commitments in Europe. The Arab Spring has shown us vividly the link between democracy and security, and we will look for opportunities to offer OSCE expertise in democratic transition and institution building to the countries of North Africa and to the OSCE's other partners, such as Afghanistan.

Soon after the Astana Summit, Belarus presented the first challenge for the OSCE as its government launched a sustained, brutal crackdown against opposition politicians and activists, civil society, and independent media after a flawed presidential election. Since then, we have worked closely with the Lithuanian Chairman-in-Office, the EU, and like-minded OSCE participating States to manage and address these issues. Despite rhetoric that it was willing to cooperate with the OSCE, Belarus refused to extend the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk, claiming that the Office's mandate had been completed. At the government's insistence, the OSCE office in Minsk officially closed in March. In stark contrast to the stunning events unfolding during the Arab Spring in Northern Africa, Belarus seems to have entered a prolonged winter of backpedaling on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In response, we joined with 13 other participating States to invoke the Moscow Mechanism, a tool established in the 1991 Moscow Document that allows for special rapporteur missions to address concerns about the implementation of human rights commitments. Together we appointed a rapporteur to investigate the crackdown by the Government of Belarus against opposition candidates, civil society representatives and journalists, and the mass arrests that followed the December 19 presidential election. Though Belarus refused to cooperate, the rapporteur was able to conduct his fact-finding mission and reported back with a number of constructive recommendations that holds the Government of Belarus accountable for its failure to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms,

including freedom of expression, prohibiting torture, and upholding the rule of law. We continue to work to ensure that the OSCE and the international community focus on the concerns raised in the report.

Dramatic developments in OSCE's partner states have captured headlines. Working closely with the Lithuanian Chair, we have supported engagement with Tunisia and Egypt in order to offer OSCE expertise to nascent democracies emerging in North Africa. We are taking a realistic, pragmatic approach offering advice and guidance on issues such as democratic elections and human rights monitoring. Assistance could come through sharing of materials such as handbooks and guidelines, visits by subject matter experts, and participation in OSCE meetings, conferences, seminars, as well as specific projects – either in the OSCE region or in the Partner State. At the request of Egyptian activists, ODIHR is already organizing a workshop for Egyptian civil society on international standards and tools of election observation, in advance of Egypt's November parliamentary elections.

Goals for Vilnius

In December, the OSCE will meet in Vilnius, Lithuania at the level of foreign ministers to review results achieved since Astana and take decisions for future work. The United States is working with like-minded partners to achieve specific results in all three dimensions:

-- In the political-military dimension, we want to agree on a substantial update of the Vienna Document, which will be reissued at Vilnius for the first time since 1999. Building on the existing measures, we are re-examining how data exchange, notification, observation, and possibly other measures can offer greater security and transparency in light of today's smaller post-Cold War military establishments. Our effort to update the Vienna Document is part of our broader commitment to improve military transparency in Europe and ensure arms control and the confidence and security building measures regime are relevant to the challenges of the 21st century. U.S. efforts to find a way forward on the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty are separate from this work on Vienna Document, but they are motivated by some of the same goals and concerns: we want to achieve greater military transparency and cooperation on conventional forces in Europe as a route to increased confidence and trust.

-- In the economic-environmental dimension, we want to endorse greater economic transparency, good governance and anti-corruption measures, as well as identify

ways to better empower women in the economic sphere. Citizens must be able to trust their governments to develop economic and environmental resources in a responsible and equitable manner. We hope that at Vilnius all OSCE members will endorse the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative endorsed by the G-8 in Deauville, and agree on goals and best practices to promote the economic empowerment of women.

-- In the human dimension, we hope to take the Helsinki Final Act into the digital age. We are seeking consensus on a declaration that would explicitly acknowledge that human rights and fundamental freedoms can apply to online activity as they do to offline activity. This includes, in particular the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. Even more urgent is the need to reaffirm and strengthen governments' commitment to the protection of journalists. Both of these goals address priority issues for both the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of Media and the Lithuanian Chairmanship.

We also want to see the OSCE give greater attention to Central Asia, including addressing longstanding challenges to democracy and human rights in that region. The OSCE can and should assist Kyrgyzstan's fledgling parliamentary democracy and play a greater role in helping stabilize and secure Afghanistan, particularly in the area of border management.

Of course, we envision that the Vilnius Ministerial will be an opportunity for OSCE Ministers to declare formally our support for Mediterranean Partners, such as Egypt and Tunisia, and offer to assist them in democratic institution building and electoral reform.

Finally, the OSCE must continue to play a direct role in resolving the protracted conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, and Nagorno-Karabakh. As the 2008 war in Georgia showed, these conflicts hold the devastating potential to destabilize security in the OSCE region, and their resolution must remain a high priority for the OSCE and all its member states. We intend to use the meeting in Vilnius to highlight progress made on each of these conflicts this year and the challenges that remain to be addressed. This is difficult and frustrating work. But OSCE is one of a handful of international institutions that has the political standing to engage on the protracted conflicts, and it has the ability to shine a light on the human and security situation in these regions. Impartial, comprehensive, accurate reporting is not something to be feared or avoided, and that is what OSCE is ideally suited to deliver, if it can get unhindered, status-neutral access to regions of conflict. If the OSCE's role is undermined, the international community is diminished; the United States will stand firmly against that. We will continue to push hard to improve the

OSCE's ability to respond to crises in a fast and effective manner, including preventing the development of new conflicts in the OSCE area.

OSCE Moving Forward

We all know that a consensus-based organization with 56 participating States sometimes moves in baby steps when we want to see larger and faster strides. We can take comfort that whether the OSCE is working to eliminate rocket fuel in Ukraine, advocating for journalists and bloggers in Azerbaijan, or developing a multi-ethnic police force in Serbia and Kyrgyzstan, those small steps can result in impressive progress over time, and thus deserve our sustained attention.

The OSCE enables its participating States to address issues of concern in a forum which allows for a full and open debate. The issues can seem intractable but exchanging words beats the alternative of exchanging bullets. We have had bullets exchanged in the OSCE space in the last three years and that is something the OSCE participating States need to eliminate in the future. The potential of the OSCE has not yet been fulfilled – and therein lies its promise for the future.

The Helsinki Commission – you, the Commissioners, and the experts on your staff – play a vital role in ensuring that the participating States keep the promises they made at Helsinki. With your support, the United States will continue to play a leading role at the OSCE, to strengthen and build upon the progress the participating States have made over the past 35 years, and bring us closer to a truly stable, secure, and prosperous OSCE region.

I am happy to take your questions at this time.