



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Alcee L. Hastings

Chairman - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

PREPARED STATEMENT

Minister Moratinos, I am pleased to welcome you to the Helsinki Commission as you prepare for the Madrid OSCE Ministerial late next month, capping off Spain's chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. From the outset, Spain has pursued an ambitious agenda for this largest regional organization stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Besides the now 56 participating States, the OSCE also maintains a relationship with the current six Mediterranean Partners, including Israel and Jordan as well as five Partners in Asia, among them Afghanistan.

In your inaugural address to the OSCE's Permanent Council, in January, you noted the complicated stage the organization and its members are passing through. That passage continues, fraught with potential pitfalls, especially given the divergent views among the participating States over fundamental aspects of the organization and its future course.

While the participating States may share a common view of Europe on paper, translating that vision into reality is another matter altogether. While all OSCE commitments have been agreed to by all of the countries, the fact is that there are human rights commitments that have been on the books for many years that would not be agreed to by some today. Indeed, the OSCE, and its precursor, the CSCE, have served as barometers for relations among the participating States. Frankly, the current barometric pressure is low, signaling a likely impending storm.

The Human Dimension rightly remains at the heart of the OSCE. Democratic development has seemingly stalled in several participating States, while civil society, human rights defenders and independent media are coming under intensified pressure as a result of their work. We welcome your efforts to draw attention to these areas of concern as well as ongoing work to combat intolerance and xenophobia, human trafficking in all of its forms, and to promote cooperation among participating States to stem the sexual exploitation of children.

Mr. Minister, I also appreciate the fact that you have crisscrossed the OSCE region in search of resolutions to longstanding crises even while trying to prevent the outbreak of new ones elsewhere. Similarly, I welcome the concerted effort you have made to engage with leaders in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. I also welcome the attention paid by the Spanish chairmanship to the economic and environmental dimension. Let me point out that the urgent issue of energy security should be high on the OSCE agenda.

As the OSCE PA's Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs, I am especially appreciative of your work to strengthen the relationship between OSCE and the Partners for Cooperation from that region and look forward to the Mediterranean Seminar on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding, scheduled to be held in mid-December, in Israel.

Looming on the horizon are pressing issues including simmering tensions with Russia in the lead up to critical parliamentary and presidential elections; a possible expanded role for the OSCE in Kosovo; prospects for OSCE involvement in Afghanistan; and engagement with the countries of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan's aspiration to chair the organization in the future.

As President Emeritus of the OSCE PA, I would note the unique role Spain played in the elaboration of another key dimension of the Helsinki Process, the parliamentary dimension. Madrid was where the founding document of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly was agreed in 1991, with close collaboration between Dante Fascell and Steny Hoyer and their colleagues from

Spain and elsewhere. An integral aspect of the OSCE, the Parliamentary Assembly has provided vital leadership in such important fields as election observation and on issues ranging from combating anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance to human trafficking.

Mr. Minister, your appearance before the Helsinki Commission today, like that of each of your predecessors since 2001, is a vital aspect of the link between parliamentarians and the OSCE.

I understand that it is a longstanding Spanish tradition to consume 12 grapes as you ring in the New Year. My hope, Mr. Minister, is that those grapes will be the sweetest the vine can produce for you and for the organization you have helped lead in 2007.