



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Christopher H. Smith

Chairman - Helsinki Commission

Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to welcome you to this U.S. Helsinki Commission hearing on “Advancing U.S. Interests through the OSCE.” I am very pleased to have several distinguished panelists present today and look forward to hearing their testimonies.

The title of this hearing is no accident. Since its inception nearly thirty years ago, the OSCE has been one of the staunchest allies of the beliefs and goals of the United States. It has multiplied the avenues through which we can promote the rule of law and human rights. It pioneered the broad definition of security that recognizes true stability does not depend on stockpiles of arms or large standing armies, but on democratic principles, respect for human rights and good neighborly conduct. It legitimized the idea that a nation’s domestic policies are the rightful concern of other OSCE States. As it reinforced these critical standards, the organization also evolved into a strong and flexible body with arguably more tools for addressing regional problems than any other international institution. The broad membership, the clearly articulated principles and the well-designed political structure make the OSCE an especially appropriate partner of the United States.

Today we have the opportunity to hear the State Department’s vision of how this organization can be most effectively utilized, and how these key policymakers intend to initiate activities and support policies through the OSCE that will advance U.S. objectives. Let me say at the outset how appreciative I am of the diligence and dogged persistence of the US Ambassador to the OSCE, Ambassador Stephan Minikes. He has done a tremendous job and deserves much credit and recognition for his leadership in Vienna.

This year we had an excellent example of how the initiative can be seized to make impressive contributions to the well-being of the entire region, while focusing on issues of particular concern to the U.S. The Arms Control Bureau of the State Department deserves praise for seeing the opportunities afforded at the OSCE to contribute to hard security issues. They presided over a strong U.S. chairmanship of the Forum for Security Cooperation, helping to revitalize that part of the organization, then used it to pass agreements on management and destruction of excess ammunition, export controls on man-portable air defense systems and the transfer of light arms. The work in the FSC complimented that undertaken by the organization as a whole to conform travel documents, to address proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and to discuss better cooperation on border security and the control of shipping containers.

Every one of these is of key concern to the U.S. and every one is a transnational issue, requiring that we address it multilaterally. This is the kind of robust use of the OSCE that is in our interest and that we would like to see supported throughout the U.S. Government.

Over the past thirty years there has also been great growth and development in the human dimension, an area of keen interest to this Commission. Next month the OSCE will hold the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw. This meeting is a regular opportunity for the participating States to review each other’s compliance with our mutual Helsinki commitments, to encourage better implementation and publicly question activities that are not consistent with the strong standards of the OSCE. We look forward to a strong presence and participation at this conference and to hearing the Department’s priorities for the meeting.

We hope that the sense of priority and urgency that characterized human rights advocacy during the Cold War will not lag now, at a time when we see examples of the starkest disregard of human dignity, and our nation and region suffer acts so brutal they were unthinkable only a few years ago. Understanding that upholding human rights is not only the policy that is ethically consistent with our ideals, but is fundamentally linked to our national and regional security, has never been more important. If a nation disregards public opinion in the oppression of its own citizens, it will also ignore violations to the

security of its neighbors. As we came to see in the Balkans, we ignore the warning signs of abusive acts at our own peril.

We have a great deal of work to do in this field. The lives of many are still on the line in the countries of Central Asia, and periodically elsewhere in the OSCE, especially if one is a democratic activist, outspoken journalist, or religious proponent. The creeping shadow of a rising anti-Semitism continues to threaten Europe. And the blight of trafficking in human beings is increasing.

Addressing economic development and environmental challenges is also important. These are linked to fundamental matters of opportunity and trust in government and to stabilizing societies through the confidence born of economic well-being. My colleague Ben Cardin, who has a special role in this area, will elaborate more on the topic. Let me just mention that it has never been more timely, and the less developed areas of the OSCE need consistent attention if we are not going to see political will undermined by the impatience that comes from economic necessity.

We also hope to hear what the administration's focus is for the forthcoming Sofia Ministerial Meeting in December. The issue that probably will have the greatest impact on the evolution of the organization and on our ability to further U.S. interests through it, is the selection of the next Secretary General. Members of this Commission are actively interested in seeing a strong leader in this office. As you know, we have written to Secretary Powell on the matter and will be following up in the near future. The world has changed in recent years for all of us. As the OSCE takes on daunting challenges, it will benefit from a potent public face and a strong managing hand to compliment the political role of the rotating Chairmanship.

Other important issues that should be considered in Sofia include: addressing expanded election commitments, such as electronic voting and voting rights of internally displaced persons; enhancing the capability to fight human trafficking; continuing efforts on anti-Semitism; the appropriate role of the Mediterranean Partners; and, addressing the concerns evinced in the statement of July 8 by nine CIS members.

Regarding the current discussions concerning refining and strengthening the OSCE, I look forward to the administration's views on the various comments by the Chairman-in-Office, Bulgaria's Foreign Minister Ambassador Solomon Passy. He has expressed support for a "better thematic as well as geographical balance within the OSCE" as also called for by nine CIS countries. Ambassador Passy has also proposed relocating meetings of the Economic Forum to Central Asia from Vienna, and the HDIM to South Caucasus. Structurally, he has also advocated stronger political leadership for the Secretary General and the Chairman-in-Office, and deeper inclusion of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE.

We have a strong panel to discuss these issues today.