

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

Helsinki on the Hill Podcast

“Parliamentary Diplomacy in Action”

Guests:

**Roberto Montella, Secretary General, Organization for Security and
Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly;
Ruxandra Popa, Secretary General, North Atlantic Treaty Organization
(NATO) Parliamentary Assembly**

Host:

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TIERSKY: Hello, and welcome back to Helsinki on the Hill, a series of conversations hosted by the United States Helsinki Commission on human rights and comprehensive security in Europe and beyond. I'm your host, Alex Tiersky.

Listeners, as I prepared for this conversation I was talking to a brand-new intern in our office about how excited it was to record this particular episode. This new intern, first day, said to me: Oh, yeah, I heard something about that. You're going to be interviewing a couple of generals, right? That should be really cool. (Laughter.) And I said, that's not quite it exactly. I explained to him that in fact this episode was going to feature the secretaries general of two really important parliamentary assemblies. Well, it was pretty obvious that my response didn't completely clear things up for him, and we're going to fix that today.

This episode is going to be a great one. Today we intend to peel back the curtain on the work of two key institutions – institutions that despite being poorly understood, even by those who follow foreign affairs pretty closely, have a really remarkable influence on a huge range of issues on the global agenda.

Today we plan to learn everything there is to know about the Parliamentary Assemblies of NATO and the OSCE. And we have with us literally the two most-qualified and best-placed individuals in the world to talk to us about these assemblies in the studio with me today. I have on my right Roberto Montella. He is the secretary general of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, based in Copenhagen. Roberto, thank you for joining us.

MONTELLA: Thank you very much, Alex, for having me on the show.

TIERSKY: To my left is Ruxandra Popa. She is the secretary general of the Parliamentary Assembly of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, also known as the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, based in Brussels. Ruxandra, thank you for joining us.

POPA: Thank you, Alex. It's great to be here with you and with Roberto.

TIERSKY: Terrific. OK, let's get back to the new intern in our office. Just out of school. First day on the job. How do you explain your job to him? Roberto, why don't you start us off?

MONTELLA: Thank you, Alex. So this is a challenge I always get, you know, also when I go back to Italy to see my parents in southern Italy. My friends say, Roberto, but what it is it that you do? We see these photos on Facebook, but you speak to interesting people. But what it is it exactly that you do? So it's difficult to explain.

But I lead a staff of 30 people between Copenhagen and Vienna. It's a small staff. And a service of parliamentarians, 57 countries, 323 members of Parliament, representing 1 billion citizens. And these members of parliament dedicate time to the work of the OSCE. And they request us to create for them the conditions to be able to work in conflict prevention, in conflict resolutions, in institution building, democracy building, dialogue. So I would describe my job as

the civil servant who creates the condition to allow these members of parliament to engage on these issues, and to engage in dialogue with the members of parliament.

TIERSKY: OK. OK. Ruxandra, how similar or different is your 30-second speech?

POPA: (Laughs.) Well, first of all, I want to pick up with what Roberto said. I'm glad I'm having this opportunity. I hope finally my dad will understand what I do. (Laughter.) Because he keeps saying to me: But, wait, isn't the secretary of general of NATO a Norwegian? And I said, yes, he's the secretary general of NATO. I'm the secretary general of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. And so this is my chance to explain the difference as well.

So the NATO Parliamentary Assembly was created separately from NATO, but as a forum for members of parliament from Europe and North America to try to understand better the challenges that both continents face in terms of security and defense. And our secretariat in Brussels is kind of the only permanent presence of the assembly, the members are national members of parliament. They're members of Congress here in the U.S., members of the Canadian Parliament, and members of various parliaments in Europe.

And so we at the secretariat try to provide them with both support in terms of policies – so, give them the information that they need to do their job as parliamentarians and have a greater say over defense and security – and also give them the information that they need to ensure that NATO is equipped and resourced to help keep citizens in Europe and North America safe. So that's our job.

TIERSKY: Tell me a little bit about your clients, the politicians who we refer to as parliamentarians. Who are these members who participate in your activities? Ruxandra, why don't you start us off?

POPA: So the profiles of our members are really very diverse. The first thing is they're all members of parliament in their national capacities. So it is – yeah, you're members of the United States Senate, United States House of Representatives, and then members of all the European parliaments. We have 29 member states in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly currently, soon to be 30 when North Macedonia joins later this year.

And the members who participate are usually members who are interested in security and defense. Sometimes they are experts, experienced members. Sometimes they are newer members who have an interest in those issues. And they want to be able to compare perspectives with their counterparts from other parliaments. But they're really varied. You know, some are young, old, male, female. Mostly male, I have to say, for now. But it's changing.

Some are, you know, former ministers, former heads of state. And they want to continue to influence policy on security and defense. Some are up and coming and, you know, they're hoping to use the assembly as a springboard. Nancy Pelosi was at one time a member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Joe Biden was, John McCain. So you know, you have – you have people who will go on and do great things afterwards.

TIERSKY: Sure. Roberto.

MONTELLA: Yes. As Ruxandra said, they are members of the national parliament. So this is a big difference with other parliaments, like European Parliament, where members are elected directly for that. In our assembly they loan their time three times a year, four times a year. They try to engage in election observation missions or in visits. But they're not permanently assigned to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

They are selected by their national parliaments in proportion to the population of each country. So there are bigger delegations from the U.S. and Russia in Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE. There are smaller delegations. We have small states. We have the Holy See in the Parliamentary Assembly. We have Andorra, Lichtenstein. And the way they are selected, that really depends on each country. So each country decides. Normally it would be a mirror of the parliamentary reality of that country. So proportionally to how that country has a majority, a minority. So they would send members in that number to our assembly.

TIERSKY: So in addition to the geographic diversity of the various national parliaments that are represented in your various assemblies, you also have ideological diversity within delegations themselves, is that right?

MONTELLA: Yes.

POPA: That's right.

MONTELLA: We have, in the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, also political groups. You have the European People's Party. You have the socialists, the liberals. These are political groups that are not formally constituted within the assembly, but they of course are expressions of the political beliefs of our members.

We have tried to – not to emphasize too much the political divide within the members because this is an assembly, especially the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, which extends between Vladivostok and Vancouver. So it has the Russians, it has the Americans, the Canadians, all the Central Asians. So it's very difficult to qualify members of a delegation from Kyrgyzstan according to the Brussels, let's say, divisions between the socialists and conservatives.

What is very interesting is that when they participate to our meetings they don't participate as national delegations. You know, you would have people from the same national delegations who would vote on one issue in one way, and some members of the same national delegations who would vote in a different way.

POPA: And I would say, if I may, Alex, that actually this diversity in our membership is one of the great added value of our – of our assemblies because, unlike – so, NATO and the OSCE, the governmental organizations to which our assemblies relate, the people who decide there are representatives of our governments, U.S. administration, European governments. Our assemblies have members of the majority, members of the opposition represented.

So sometimes the tone of our discussions can be somewhat different because, you know, it is a parliament after all. And so you have somewhat more freedom in the type of discussions that we have. And the consensus might be quite different from what it is in governmental organizations.

TIERSKY: Let me then piggyback off of that word that you just used, consensus. It's my understanding that both at NATO and at the OSCE on the governmental side, meaning the heads of government, the ambassadors they have there working every week on these issues, any decision is made by consensus – really meaning if any member state or participating State in the OSCE context objects, that decision doesn't go forward. Can you tell me a little bit about how the assembly is maybe different than that, Roberto?

MONTELLA: Yes. That's one of the biggest differences between the Parliamentary Assembly and the governmental side of the OSCE. In the OSCE, you have the rule of consensus. So the OSCE can only say something as OSCE if all 57 countries, 57 participating States as we call it in the OSCE, agree to it. So if one government wants to say, today it's a sunny day. It's enough that one participating State does not agree with that, today it's not a sunny day. And this is a challenge, of course. It's also maybe one of the strength of the governmental side of the OSCE.

However, the Parliamentary Assembly is lucky because we vote by majority in our assembly. And this is one of the strength. As you can see during the 2014 crisis in Ukraine the organization couldn't come up with a statement condemning what has happened in Crimea, while Ben Cardin's resolution in Baku managed to call for clear, gross, and uncorrected violations by the Russian Federation to the Helsinki Final Accords. So this is one of the strength of this assembly, that you can have – you can speak up, you know, while the governmental side cannot always speak up.

TIERSKY: So, Roberto, let me just underline that point that you just made, because I think it's absolutely crucial. When Russia illegally occupied Crimea, and is still there, because Russia is a participating State in the OSCE governmental side, that prevented that organization from making any kind of condemnation of this act, which really overturned the European security order. But the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, voting by majority, has been able to every year since then regularly condemn this, as you said, gross, uncorrected violation of the Helsinki Final Act principles that our regular listeners know is the foundation of what the Helsinki Commission and the OSCE are all about.

Ruxandra, can you give me an example about how the NATO Parliamentary Assembly might be able to, by majority, make a decision that might be more – or, a statement, a political statement, that might be more difficult from NATO itself? That Jens Stoltenberg, the secretary general of –

POPA: The other one. (Laughter.)

TIERSKY: The other secretary general wouldn't be able to get to? Please.

POPA: (Laughs.) I think in our context, Alex, it is maybe less that there would be a major divergence of opinion within the assembly compared with what NATO says. But there are issues that NATO as an organization doesn't discuss but our assembly would, because it would feel that, you know, it is an issue that affects transatlantic relationships. So it affects Europe. It affects North America. And it might not be a core NATO issue to start with, but our assembly members feel it's something important for members of parliament from Europe and North America to discuss.

One historic example has been climate change. The assembly has talked about climate change and its impact on security already in the late 1980s, so way before, you know, it really came to the forefront of the international agenda, and particularly for security organizations. Because, you know, climate change is seen as an issue from many different angles. But the connection with security wasn't clear to many people for a long time. So this is, for me, one example where the assembly has played this role of actually raising an issue that has then later on been picked up by NATO as an issue for them as well.

MONTELLA: I want to pick up on that because it's very interesting, your question, the consensus role within the NATO PA and the OSCE. One of the major differences I think within our organization is that, indeed, in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and NATO in general is a military alliance, but of countries more or less like-minded, you know? They have a common charter. In the preamble of NATO, you abide to liberal democracy, rule of law. So somehow there is "e dementiri" (ph) we would say in Latin – you know, like a common view.

In the OSCE, the common values were agreed in '75, in 1990, in the Paris – Charter of Paris. But I would say today these values, though countries have recommitted to them, would be very difficult to agree on those values today. And the biggest difference is that within the membership of the OSCE you have countries which are at war with each other. Clearly at war or undeclared war. But you have Armenia and Azerbaijan. You have Russia and Moldova. You have territories of Georgia being occupied by Russia. You have Russian-Ukraine on a daily basis in a conflict. You have victims every day in Donbas.

So it's much more difficult to find dialogue between members of parliament of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, because some of them and their governments are clearly at war with each other.

TIERSKY: So in that type of context, Roberto, is it worthwhile to try to find areas of joint work, to not say consensus. But do you still talk about the issues that are difficult? Do the parliamentarians want to engage on these issues that prevent consensus? Or is it really just about, let's say, easier issues, where there might be more readily found agreement?

MONTELLA: Thank you for the question, because I consider myself a bridge builder. And I've worked in the Balkans exactly putting together Albanians and Serbs in trying to find solutions to their problems. So in the Parliamentary Assembly, we do try to do that. We do try to do that besides the official proceedings of the Parliamentary Assembly meetings. I have personally tried to put together the head of the Russian delegation with the head of the Ukrainian

delegation. But not in official meetings, but maybe in meetings outside the parameters of the official OSCE PA proceedings.

And they will talk to each other. Now, if this discussion brings to a solution to the conflict, that is to be seen. Because, of course, members of parliament have some influence, but it's their government who then will decide on the course of these events. I have tried to put together the head of the Ukrainian and Russian delegation talking to each other. And they would, to the point that it was a very pleasant conversation, up until the time when other members of their delegations would join in the conversation.

And I could see physically – I was there between the two of them. And the moment other members of their delegations, maybe officials from the government, came in, you could see the tone of their voices changing and their rhetoric returning to a very confrontational attitude there. So this shows, you know, that sometimes – (laughs) – you have to do things outside of the normal channels of communication.

TIERSKY: I take your point on really coming back to what you started with, which is you're trying to create the conditions for, at least, the dialogue that's a central part of this.

Let me shift us to part of what we're talking about here, which is we've been able to establish that your assemblies, because of the consensus rule, are able to advance positions that the governmental side finds more difficult, particularly on the OSCE side. But let's say on the NATO side as well. How do the governmental-side organizations – so, again, not the Parliamentary Assemblies but, in the NATO case, the organization headed by Jens Stoltenberg, how do they react to the statements that come out of your respective parliamentary assemblies? How do your parliamentarians take what is their rhetorical devices – whether it's speeches or maybe documents that they might be able to agree or not agree on – how does that drive then the action on the governmental side? Please, Rux.

POPA: I would say we currently have a really very close relationship with NATO. I think both us and NATO understand that there's great value in the exchanges that we have. And that allows our members, actually, to have more influence also in NATO discussions. I think from the NATO perspective, having an organization that brings together 266 members of parliament from 29 countries, and having them as, you know, one interlocutor – whenever they need to talk to parliamentarians they come to us. And our debates will give them an indication of where collective parliamentary opinion or public opinion – because our members, after all, are representatives of their citizens – of where parliamentary and public opinion lies.

So I think, you know, that fact that we give them that means that they will listen to what the assembly says, and they will get a sense of: OK, is that a direction that the alliance should be going? But there's really two ways that our assembly can actually have an influence, is directly through our conversations with NATO, and then through their work back in their national parliaments. So it's good that the assembly adopts, you know, reports and resolutions, and we do. And, by the way, do have a look on those. You know, they're available on our website and they have lots of real useful information.

But then it's important for our members to take them back to their national parliaments and act upon them. So whenever we recommend that NATO governments should do, I don't know, you know, increase defense budgets, take an example, it's important that our members then bring this issue back, and push their colleagues to actually discuss that back home.

TIERSKY: Yeah. Yeah.

Roberto, tell me a little bit about the relationship between the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE governmental side.

MONTELLA: The governmental side reacts to our resolutions in different ways. I would tell you, on a personal level, I have received many times ambassadors who have joined me after our statements or our final resolutions saying: Well, finally somebody can say these things. You know, so off the record they will tell you: We love it. We love that you can say these things. I would have loved to say this thing, but my government doesn't allow me. Or, I cannot pass it as a decision of the Permanent Council because of the consensus rule. So it's great that the Parliamentary Assembly can actually speak up and say those things.

What normally happens is that we have an annual session in July. We produce three resolutions. We produce supplementary items. We produce documents on different issues within the OSCE regions. And we present this to the governments, to the ministerial meeting of the OSCE that takes place in December. Unfortunately, not all these resolutions can be adopted as documents of the ministerial council because of the consensus rule. So you will always find a country that doesn't like, of course, to be criticized, and will put a veto on that document. But there are issues – like, for example, a resolution of Chris Smith on antitrafficking, that was recently adopted also as a ministerial declaration. So there are issues where it will be also possible to have a consensus within the governmental side of the organization.

But I very strongly believe that the organization's – not only the OSCE governmental side, and the parliamentary side, but also the other organizations should work together as a whole in order to deliver.

TIERSKY: Roberto, I'll just interject here, you mentioned Chris Smith, of course, a former chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, long-time member of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and a real leader on international efforts on human trafficking, among a number of other issues. Thank you for calling him out.

Let me have a quick shift again in our conversations, because we've heard indications of what the work actually looks like. And, Roberto, you've mentioned a schedule of meetings. Ruxandra, you've mentioned adopting reports and resolutions. Roberto, if I'm not mistaken, you've also mentioned election observation. This all sounds like quite a frenzy of activity. So let's make it a little bit more concrete. Ruxandra, why don't you start by explaining to us what exactly your main activities are. We've talked about the members of Parliament that are participating. What are they actually doing?

POPA: (Laughs.) Well, I would say there's two things that they do. The first one is, you know, they're parliamentarians. So they want to get together and discuss documents, so that their collective opinion can be, you know, enshrined in NATO resolution or a report. So we have two sessions every year, one in the spring and one in the autumn, that bring together between 500 and 600 participants. And so over three or four days they will have discussions with experts to, yeah, discuss what are the key challenges to security in Europe and North America. And then at the end of those days, they will adopt reports and they will adopt resolutions. So that's one aspect of the work that we do.

But then to gather information for those reports and for those resolutions, our members also organize fact-finding visits. So they will go to countries in NATO, or beyond NATO, to actually meet with their counterparts in those parliaments, meet with government officials, experts, NGOs, representatives of embassies, and international organizations to try to understand the challenges that those countries face, and try to feed that into their discussions in our sessions. So we organize – besides those two sessions, we have about 30 meetings that we organize every year. That's quite a busy agenda, indeed. But as a – say, as an individual member of the assembly, you would maybe participate to six or seven of those. So 35 is our menu, but each individual member probably attends, six, seven, eight activities every year.

TIERSKY: Tell me what these members are doing, and what the schedule looks like.

POPA: Our key constraint and challenge is our members of parliament are busy. So their time is, you know, the finite resource that we have to make the best use of. And so when we take them somewhere, we need to, you know, understand that during that time they are away from their national business, and they are away from their constituents.

So when they come it is really about working hard, meeting – as I said – meeting their counterparts in parliaments, meeting experts, traveling sometimes to conflict areas. You know, we've had delegations go to Afghanistan regularly at the time when NATO was involved there with a bigger effort. It's still involved there, but at the time when it had 140,000 troops deployed in Afghanistan. We've had delegations of members of parliament travel there so that they can understand, you know, what exactly is NATO's engagement there, and what it means for their countries and for their citizens.

TIERSKY: Roberto, I imagine the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly also has an ambitious schedule of large meetings of hundreds of parliamentarians. Tell us a little bit more about how you organize the assembly's work.

MONTELLA: We have also three annual sessions where members meet, gather, and produce documents and resolutions. And as Ruxandra was saying, they like to discuss issues between themselves. But what I would like to also underline is all the other activities that we do. Mainly the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly focuses on election observation. This year only we will have 12 election observation missions. It's members of parliament going to a country, assessing the election proceedings in that country, and making a statement after it.

Under my leadership also, I thought it was very important to create committees that would deal with the current challenges that we're having today in global political world – mainly terrorism and migration. And so we've created two committees on terrorism and migration to allow members to engage further in details on these issues. The Committee on Terrorism, we went to Utøya, to Norway, to see what happened in 2011 – the 22nd of July 2011, a tragedy where 77 kids were killed by a lunatic, I'd say. But it's very important for these members also to see how other countries deal with the scourge of terrorism, what are the legislations that they adopt.

So it's experience that members of parliament take also from other countries, the best practices of other countries, and then they try to bring them back in their countries. The advantages of being in a multinational parliamentary assembly is that a lot of legislations needs to be also transnational. Criminals don't stop at borders. Actually, sometimes we should take example from the very good skills in cooperation that criminals have, you know, like maybe sometimes it's difficult for law enforcement or rule of law agencies trying to exchange information. So parliamentarians can be instrumental in that. You know, can try to harmonize legislation to allow better information sharing.

So on migration we've been at the borders of Syria and Turkey. I've been personally twice to camps organized by Turks, in 2012 and 2015, immediately after the war in Syria broke out. And on climate change we've been with a delegation recently in Svalbard in the very north to see how –

TIERSKY: In the Arctic Circle.

MONTELLA: In the Arctic Circle, to see how the climate change affects also those population, but also how it affects the entire issues of security besides the issues of economy.

So they engage also in activities of conflict prevention. So we have our members going to visit areas of conflict, try to activate activities of mediation between parties who are in conflict. So it's a lot of activities besides the regular gatherings.

TIERSKY: It sounds like the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly that you lead has evolved to take on some of the emerging challenges – terrorism, immigration – you know, they've been with us for a long time, but clearly with a new prominence. Let me turn that question then over to Ruxandra.

Ruxandra, tell us a little bit about how the NATO Parliamentary Assembly has changed over time to deal with new and emerging issues, and how you think that might continue to change in the coming years.

POPA: Well, in fact, I think I was hinting at that earlier. From the very foundation of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in 1955, our founding fathers, the members of parliament who created the assembly, wanted it to have a broad agenda. They wanted it – you know, they wanted to allow members of parliament to bring up any issues that could have an impact on the transatlantic relationship. And so that meant that from the very beginning when, you know, we

created our first committees, we had, for instance, committees on education and, you know, civil dimension of security. And that continues today.

Obviously the focus of the assembly changes as well with international events. So obviously since 2014 our agenda is very much focused on, you know, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, against Georgia, and its destabilizing activities around the world, a focus on terrorism, instability in the Middle East. So all these issues are very high on the assembly's agenda. Now, going forward, obviously China is going to be an issue where the assembly has obviously discussed in the past as well, but it's now, you know, the focus on China's ambitions – politically and militarily, I think is going to grow within the assembly. So watch that space.

TIERSKY: Sure, yeah. So you've both convinced me, and I think our listeners as well, that these assemblies are hard work and they're hard work that produces a lot of value. I think another piece of evidence, unfortunately, that we have for that is that, you know, some of our listeners who might be a little bit more familiar with the world of parliamentary assemblies might have seen headlines not too long ago alleging some corruption at a sister organization, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Now, I want to be clear with our listeners, neither of you here with me are representing that organization. But clearly you are aware of this controversy.

Roberto, I'd love to ask you to maybe fill our listeners in to more or less your understanding of what happened, and then maybe both of you could talk a little bit about how your assemblies reacted to that instance of, let's say, corruption.

MONTELLA: Yes, thank you, Alex.

Indeed, we are not representative of that organization, but we are not happy about what happened in that organization. And I feel that what happened is something that affects us all. There was a report on instances of corruption, by Azerbaijan mainly, and it was called Caviar Diplomacy. We have not commented on the report itself, but we have tried to be reactive in the – we have tried to prevent something like this to happen within our Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE by putting together measures that would avoid these instances to happen with our assembly, mainly on election observation.

So we've never had problems within the Parliamentary Assembly, but we thought it's better to make more stringent rules in the election observation, in the way we select our members to do election observation, in the way in which we scrutinize their backgrounds. So now members have to fill up a form before they participate into an election observation mission, by self-declaring whether they have an interest in the country where they observe an election, whether they have conflict of interest with that country. Of course, we cannot – we don't have the capability to enter into too much personal questions about those members, but it's very important that the Parliamentary Assembly gives itself some more stringent rules to avoid episodes of corruption.

It's very unfortunate what has happened in the Council of Europe. I know my colleague in the Council of Europe has made a strong reaction from the secretariat. They have put together their own new set of rules. And I think that they are very solid to avoid these episodes.

TIERSKY: Yeah. I mean, I'll just come back to the point I was making earlier, which is if these parliamentary assemblies didn't have some value there would be no need for attempts to corrupt their work.

Ruxandra, do you have anything to add on this issue?

POPA: Yeah. So obviously that's an issue that our assembly has followed as well. And we've also tried to react, to make sure that we were also bulletproof to anything that could undermine the credibility of our work. And so Roberto's mentioned the rules on election monitoring. Our assembly also occasionally participates in election monitoring. And we do so in close cooperation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and also the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament. And our members, as well, have to sign, you know, that paper that says, yeah, we understand that, you know, as international observers we have to respect a number of rules of, you know, impartiality. And so that's a key concrete measure that was taken, indeed, as a result of this case.

Then I have to say, our national parliaments as well have taken measures about, you know, accepting hospitality from certain countries. So I think that that's – they're also more strict about what their members can do, and cannot do, when they travel. And then finally, we've amended our rules of procedure to include a provision about the removal of elected officials within the NATO Parliamentary Assembly as well. So that's there as a deterrent. You know, I hope we never have to use that.

TIERSKY: I'd say it enables the organization to remove a problematic individual member. Yeah.

POPA: Exactly. Exactly.

TIERSKY: I see.

MONTELLA: Just to pick up on this, because it gives me the opportunity to talk about this plethora of international organizations that you have here – the Council of Europe, you have the European Parliament, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE. And I think Ruxandra and I are pretty young in our jobs. And we are new secretary generals. One of the things that I think I can speak also for Ruxandra here, we would like to introduce, is more this concept that all these organizations have to work together.

And I think the key to that is that you have to put the focus on who do we do all of this for? You know, it's the citizens, the citizens of the OSCE participating States, the citizens of NATO, the end-users, I would say, of the product that we deliver.

And so if you have that in mind, if you think – it gives a different type of meaning to what we do, because you say, OK, all I'm doing – you know, resolutions, meetings, statements – it's at the end of the day to make the life of that individual citizen better. And so once you focus on that, then you forget about the corporate identity. Of course, here I represent the OSCE. She represents NATO. Our colleagues represent Council of Europe. But we're not in competition.

TIERSKY: Sure. Roberto, I take your point completely.

I do want to however, at the same time, realize that there – these organizations have different memberships with different sets of values that they bring to the table. And we've alluded to that a couple of times.

Which allows me to actually ask Ruxandra about another issue that a number of countries have with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which is – as a result of Russia's occupation of Crimea, the Russian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was disinvented.

I'm aware that the NATO Parliamentary Assembly has, in the past, had a relationship with Russian parliamentarians. Ruxandra, can you tell us a little bit about what that relationship has looked like, how it's evolved over time, and where it stands today?

POPA: Yeah, sure. So actually very early on after the end of the Cold War the assembly opened its doors to Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. So we had a partnership with Russia dating back to 1991. And Russia was participating in our meetings not as a full member – because the full members are only NATO members – but, as we call, an associate member. But that meant that Russian parliamentarians could participate in almost everything that we did, whether, you know, big sessions, seminars, those fact-finding missions that I mentioned earlier. And they did. And very actively so.

Then came 2008, and Russia's war in Georgia, and following that the assembly decided to adopt a number of sanctions against the Russian delegation. They were still able to participate in our sessions. And we had a bilateral group with Russia that continued meeting. But they were excluded from a number of activities. Then 2014 came, and Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, and then our members said: OK, this is not the first time. And this is a serious escalation. You are talking about illegally annexing another country. This was unheard of since the Second World War. And so they decided at that point to actually expel the Russian delegation. So no longer sanction, but actually expel the Russian delegation.

So this is where we are now. We have no contacts anymore with the Russian parliament. Our leadership is reviewing the situation at regular intervals to see if there's any change in Russia's policies that would grant the assembly changing its positions. And up until now, it's considered that it hasn't. That there's no grounds whatsoever to reconsider our position. So this is where we are.

TIERSKY: OK. OK. Roberto, please.

MONTELLA: Yes. As a consequence of the Russians no longer participating in the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the entire delegation and the leadership of that delegation in the Council of Europe moved to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. They have always remained in the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE. They were not expelled. They listen to criticism, of course. They do not like some of our resolutions that we issue. But in our Parliamentary Assembly, they have somehow always been present. They use the occasion also to meet sometimes with the delegations of the U.S. You know, so it's a – it's a place where we keep on maintaining a dialogue with the Russian delegation.

The dialogue is the pillar of our organization. I often travel with the president. And we often talk to leaders. And the –

TIERSKY: Sorry, the president of the Parliamentary Assembly, now George Tsereteli from Georgia. Yeah.

MONTELLA: The Parliamentary Assembly, yes, yes. And the – if you like, the thread, the “fil rouge,” the main gist of all our discussions always end up with, well, this conflict, this situation, could be resolved, if there was political will. And always, the political will is addressed to one office, one leader, or at least a couple of leaders. And the question that comes is how do you forge political will? What are the tools that the international community has in order to forge political will?

Is it sanctions? Is it the technique of naming and shaming? So this is a bit what we do. You know, we issue resolutions. We of course call on the violations of our values by one participating state. But are these the only tools? Is it just sanctions? Is it naming and shaming? Or is it maybe what we use, dialogue. I would say a little bit of all of these things. Dialogue of course has to be a dialogue that leads to some concrete measures. And within the Parliamentary Assembly we very strongly believe also in engaging in dialogue with people with whom we disagree.

TIERSKY: Roberto, let me shift gears a little bit, because we a moment ago were talking about a national delegation. We had a conversation about the role of the Russian delegation. I would be remiss in not asking you to talk a bit about the engagement of American members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the United States Senate, both individually and together as delegations to your respective bodies. What has U.S. engagement meant to the history of your organizations? And what has U.S. engagement meant in terms of the work of – the day-to-day work of each of your assemblies?

Roberto, I'd like to start with you, please.

MONTELLA: The U.S. is fundamentally in our organization the founding father of our organization. My predecessor was a chief of the Helsinki Commissioner, Spencer Oliver.

TIERSKY: Sorry, if I might interrupt, listeners may want to go back to the very first episode of this podcast where we had a significantly – very interesting discussion with Spencer Oliver. So please, continue.

MONTELLA: OK. Well, Spencer is an icon in our assembly. He's basically written the rules, together of course with the members. But he has written in the – he has suggested the language in the Charter of Paris on the establishment of the Parliamentary Assembly. So he's a person – so this shows how important was the U.S. in establishing the Parliamentary Assembly. But members of the U.S. – the U.S. delegation to the OSCE have had leading roles. Alcee Hastings was the president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for two years.

TIERSKY: Current chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, Congressman Hastings.

MONTELLA: Correct. Senator Roger Wicker is our current vice president. Congressman Hudson is vice chair of our Terrorism Committee. Chris Smith is our representative on trafficking. Ben Cardin is the special representative of the president on issues of tolerance, discrimination and anti-Semitism. I'm sure I'm forgetting other members. (Laughs.) But you've had that very, very strong presence of the U.S. in our – in our Parliamentary Assembly.

But not only as individuals holding offices, but also as members setting a tone and presenting – representing values with their actions. I was very impressed this morning we had a hearing of the OSCE president – the OSCE parliamentary president and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly president. And one of the questions that Chairman Hastings brought up was, well, here in the U.S. we have some issues – with Guantanamo, or with the death penalty. And, you know, issues of black male being harassed by the police. Does this make us less morally outstanding to present our values at the outside world?

And I would say the very fact that the question came from the chairman of the Helsinki Commission shows how important and how morally authoritative is the U.S. to the international world. So I think the U.S. delegation plays an important role in the OSCE PA. I would – if I can make a little digression, as being a person who's worked in the Balkans, I've seen also the role of the U.S. in general in conflict prevention and conflict resolution. So the fact that today you've had congressmen participating in our hearings while there is a lot of activities happening in Washington shows also the interest of the U.S. in international politics in a moment where there is more and more the fear that the U.S. might look more inwardly and not participate very much into world politics.

TIERSKY: Ruxandra, then do you see a disengagement by the United States Congress in your organization?

POPA: Certainly not. I mean, the U.S. delegation is extremely active within our organization. And to be very honest, there would be no NATO. There would be no NATO PA without the U.S. And so we're very grateful for the time that the U.S. delegation is putting into our organization. Our U.S. delegation is currently led by Gerry Connolly and includes a bipartisan – on a bipartisan basis experienced members interested in foreign affairs and defense, and experts on these issues. Mike Turner from Ohio is both a former president and currently a vice president of our organization. And obviously he's also very experienced as an elected member of Dayton, Ohio. He brings in also his constituency perspective, you know, of

involvement in the western Balkans and also the fact that, you know, his constituency holds one of the largest airbases in the U.S.

I would say, he's also – you know, our members – our European members are very grateful for the U.S. engagement, but they sometimes find it difficult to understand the constraints that U.S. members of Congress face in traveling to some of our meetings. And so we, you know, try to explain that, you know, U.S. members face elections every two years. Nowhere in Europe do you have a parliament that's elected every two years. And so I think it's important to really explain that to our European members, that when U.S. members come to our meetings it's actually – it is a big deal for them. And they're really making a point of showing their commitment to our organizations. And we're very grateful for that.

TIERSKY: Well, I would – as I conclude, I would want to make sure that our listeners know that part of what they see in the – in the value of your Parliamentary Assemblies is exemplified in what they're proposing here in Washington. In particular, I'd raise the proposal that two of our most senior commissioners from the Senate side from the Helsinki Commission – Senators Roger Wicker and Ben Cardin – have introduced a bill to strengthen the Organization of American States by increasing the involvements of legislators in that organization. And it seeks to essentially create a parliamentary assembly for the Organization of American States patterned off of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Roberto, that you lead.

I would like to thank you very much, both, for joining us on the podcast today. It's been a really fascinating conversation. Before we go, I would like you very much to tell our listeners where they can go exactly to get more information on your assemblies. Perhaps some of our younger listeners would be interested in working for you someday. Please, Ruxandra, why don't you start?

POPA: Yeah, thank you, Alex. That's great because, yeah, I did want to do a little bit of advertising. (Laughter.) So as I mentioned earlier, all the documents that the assembly produces are on our website. So go to www.NATO-PA.int. And then on social media, you can find all those from our website. These are – it's a great resource of information for anybody interested in security and defense. And then yes, indeed. So we have an internship program for young master's graduates. We take 10 young bright graduates every year to work for us. And they do actual work. We wouldn't survive without our researchers. So I would encourage any young students, you know, interested in defense and in NATO to have a look on our website and apply for the position.

TIERSKY: Well, from what I'm seeing from Roberto, you might have some competition for those excellent candidates. Roberto, tell us a little bit about where people can find out more about your assembly.

MONTELLA: I wouldn't call it competition, because many of our research fellows have worked in both assemblies.

POPA: That's right. That's right. (Laughter.)

MONTELLA: So sometimes we take the best students, the best researchers.

TIERSKY: Addicted to parliamentary diplomacy.

MONTELLA: But yeah, of course, you find on our website, OSCEPA.org, all the documents. But we also have an internship program. We have a JPA program, a junior professional program now. We value very much the work of young people. I, myself, was a former research fellow in '98, the Deputy Secretary General Gustavo Pallares. He's also former research fellow. I think I would say 70 percent of our staff are former research fellows. And so we have a very young staff. Recently we've hired many of staff who had done recently an internship with us. So we like the program very much and we encourage young people to apply.

TIERSKY: Clearly. Well, Roberto, Ruxandra, this has been a fascinating conversation. Thank you so much for your time. Thanks for being here with us in Washington from Copenhagen and Brussels, respectively.

With that, listeners, we've come to the end of another episode of Helsinki on the Hill. We're always interested in hearing back from you with feedback. Get in touch via our website, www.CSCE.gov, our Facebook page, Twitter. We're all over the place. Thanks, again, for joining us on Helsinki on the Hill. Until the next conversation, I'm Alex Tiersky, signing off.

(END)