



DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: RENEWING THE PROMISE OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS

**Opening Statement by Andrew Wilson
Managing Director
Center for International Private Enterprise**

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

July 26, 2017

Chairman Wicker and Co-Chairman Smith, Distinguished Members of the Committee, Senate and the House of Representatives,

I wish to begin by welcoming this timely briefing and thank Erika Schlager of the Helsinki Commission for leading this very important initiative.

- Countries across Central and Eastern Europe have made great strides since the 1990s, building democratic institutions, growing market economies, and joining the European Union and NATO and the people of this region should be proud of the progress they have made.
- Thanks to the work of committed citizens and visionary leaders, countries have been transformed from repressive communist systems to exemplars of political freedom and vibrant commerce. In large part, these changes have served as a beacon for citizens also beyond this region's borders.
- Yet, recently, many of Europe's new democracies have faced serious stresses, which raise questions about the resilience of new transitions, and threaten to undo the progress that the region has made during the last three decades. Moreover, the political climate in Europe has revealed significant risks to the system of European multilateralism.

- The complex challenges of globalization and resurgence of authoritarianism have increasingly led to significant disenfranchisement and fueled the anti-system feelings. Many of the problems in this region and across the globe however don't stem from the failure of democracy, rather a failure to more actively pursue its consolidation, and ensure that the economic and social benefits of democracy penetrated throughout societies.
- There is very clearly genuine interest in reinvigorating the region's democratic trajectory by addressing home-grown failures of governance and following through on promised reforms. At the same time, the citizens of the Central and Eastern European countries want a greater say in how their countries, and how Europe as a whole, is governed, and more local control over their affairs, including in the business realm.
- For the past two years, CIPE has therefore been supporting local voices in Central and Eastern Europe in their efforts to understand the current challenges to freedom, democracy and markets, pave their own way to demonstrate that democracy can meet today's challenges and to revive people's faith in it. This would not be possible without a generous support of the U.S. Congress and the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy and I would like to recognize them for their continued commitment to the region.
- Earlier this year, CIPE with many of its partners from across Central and Eastern therefore launched a declaration reaffirming our own Euro-Atlantic commitment to democracy and private enterprise. The purpose of this modest action is to make a broader statement about our desire to forge a renewed commitment to regional and global economic systems based on the principles of democratic dialogue, free markets, and rule of law that guarantees a level playing field.
- As expressed in the Declaration, civil society and business representatives from the region are committed to the values of democracy and the market economy, and are seeking to take concrete steps to address the democratic challenges that the other distinguished speakers will discuss later today. Their ideas such as improvement of the entrepreneurial environment to foster growth and encouragement of citizens' engagement in democratic decision-making should be welcomed; otherwise the influence of antidemocratic elements will continue to grow.
- Because a free and prosperous Europe is one of the key pillars of the lasting relevance of universal values of liberty, democracy and free enterprise in the still-evolving global arena, our Transatlantic alliance has to remain strong. The US enduring commitment to support healthy democracies and thriving markets including in Europe runs very deep and the role that Helsinki Commission has recently been playing is a great proof of that commitment.

- In this respect business leaders also have a critically important role to play. They must become the champions of advancing democratic and pro-democratic values. Coordinated and sustained engagement with reform-minded business is specifically needed because only in functioning democracies the private market system provides the economic opportunity necessary for sustainable democratic stability.
- The lessons we are learning now about how our nations, republics, unions and alliances are managed, and how to balance those institutions with the role of the individual in society, will have lasting ramifications for whether we succeed in ensuring stability of the global architecture and furthering human progress in future. Thus, because our alliance is only as strong as we are, we pledge to continue to support similar efforts, exchange of ideas and mobilization of democratic champions across the globe to safeguard democracy that delivers also in the interest of future generations free from memories of our struggles against totalitarianism.