

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

“The Western Balkans: Perspectives From OSCE Field Missions”

Committee Staff Present:

Robert Hand, Policy Advisor, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Participants:

Ambassador Jonathan Moore, former Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014-2017);

**Jeff Goldstein, Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje (2016-present)
(Via videoconference);**

Michael Uyehara, former Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia (2014-2017);

Ambassador Marcel Peško, Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre, OSCE Secretariat (2015-present)

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HAND: OK, I think we can start now. It can be somewhat difficult to start a briefing that's been planned weeks ahead on a pre-arranged subject that then takes place on the day after an attack like that occurred yesterday in New York. It shifts the focus of our attention away from our work and can make us question the importance of what we are doing. But then we realize that that is what those who commit these terrorist acts want us to do.

So, instead, we convene our briefing, which has as its most general goal making one small but significant region of this world, the Balkans, a better place for its good people. And we all gather here for this because we share that goal, even if our perspectives may differ somewhat. So let us move forward not only undeterred by what happened in New York yesterday, but more determined than ever to do what we do the best that we can.

I would like to thank our panel and the audience for being here this morning to discuss the Western Balkans, or Southeast Europe if you prefer, and the role of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – the OSCE – in assisting the countries of the region as they continue to recover from the lingering effects of brutal conflicts in the 1990s, and to reform their political and economic systems in accordance with OSCE norms and their respective aspirations for European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

The turnout today is, for me, an indication of ongoing interest in the Western Balkans. While the region is no longer a high-profile item in the media or a priority for international action, there is clearly recognition here – and there should be elsewhere – that the international community's work in the Balkans has not been completed, and that the work remaining is important. The Western Balkan countries are part of Europe, and their stability and prosperity affect European security. Those countries that have not already done so are at least the next in line to join NATO or the European Union if they so choose, and delay or denial of their aspirations for integration have definite implications, especially today when other outside forces are at play in the region. And with so much progress achieved since the late 1990s, consolidating that progress and making it less vulnerable to reversals should not require the enormous time or resources seen in the past, and yet could make a significant difference.

The OSCE has been a fairly consistent part of the international community's response to the challenges of the region, from the outbreak of the violence in the early 1990s to the post-conflict recovery and reform efforts that bring us to the present. The Organization's work in observing elections is well-known, but the missions it has deployed in each of the countries of the region have done good work that is often ignored. OSCE field activity exists today in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. I should note a mission previously was deployed in Croatia, prior to its EU membership.

And we hope to hear about OSCE work in these countries from those who recently participated in it directly, still do so today, or oversee it from the Secretariat in Vienna. Hopefully, the discussion will not be just about the countries of the Western Balkans, but also a little bit about the utility and the advantages of the OSCE and its assets more generally as a multilateral diplomatic response to the challenges the 57 OSCE-participating states face today. The presence of the OSCE in the field is not limited to the Balkans, for example. It is most

visible in Ukraine today, but it had its start with the first deployments in the Balkans in the second half of 1992.

Short biographies provided by each of our panelists have been made available, along with any statements that were made in advance, so let me go on simply to introduce and personally welcome each participant in order. We will go chronologically in the order in which the missions were established.

This means we will start with the OSCE Mission to Skopje and its deputy head, Jeff Goldstein. This mission was one of the first deployed in the Balkans to counter the spillover effects of the conflict then raging in Bosnia, and it has maintained a steady presence through that conflict, the subsequent Kosovo conflict, the conflict in Macedonia itself in 2001, and to the recent political crisis and ongoing reform challenges of today. Jeff has been on the mission for well over a year, and can provide insights on the latest developments in the country.

I should clarify that the Helsinki Commission refers to that country by its constitutional name, Macedonia, as does the United States. But the country was made a participating state of the OSCE using its interim name, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Those representing the Organization, therefore, will understandably need to respect that designation.

I also, frankly, want to start with Jeff while the technology is working and we can hear and see each other. I have a bit of a Rodney Dangerfield complex, and my greatest fear right now is turning around and seeing a blank screen and then wondering what to do next. It's not easy being me. But since Jeff is there right now and we can hear him well, I believe, let us proceed. Jeff, do you want to begin?

GOLDSTEIN: Thank you, Bob. And greetings to everyone from Skopje. I'd like to begin by giving you a brief rundown of events here over the last year, and then talking a bit more about the role of our mission.

2016 ended on a very positive note here in Skopje. After two false starts earlier in the year, parliamentary elections that had been called to try and break a political crisis that had been gripping the country for two years were finally held, and they were judged to be largely free and fair.

And I think in particular there were two things that are real positives coming out of those elections. The first is that for the first time in the history of this country, there was an effort by one of the major political parties to reach out to voters across the ethnic divide. And that actually was a very successful effort, in that several tens of thousands of ethnic Albanian citizens voted for the Social Democratic Party, or SDSM.

The second positive that came out of the elections is that turnout was up significantly over the previous elections in 1994, growing by 6 percent, which I think speaks to the fact that the citizens of the country both cared about politics and had faith that the democratic process could actually bring positive change to their lives.

Now, the elections did result in a very close result. The conservative party VMRO, which had been the governing party since 2006, came away with 51 seats in parliament, while SDSM came away with 49. The largest Albanian party, DUI, which had been in coalition with VMRO since 2008, saw its share or its number of voters drop precipitously as ethnic Albanians not only voted for the Social Democratic Party, but also for newly minted political parties on the ethnic Albanian political scene, the Alliance for Albanians and Besa.

Nevertheless, the 10 seats that DUI won would have been enough to create or recreate a DUI-VMRO coalition with a one-vote advantage in the 120-seat parliament, and the two parties began negotiations toward that end, only to fail as a number of senior people in DUI had come to believe that their party's poor results in the election were a result of the fact that their electorate had come to see the long-term partnership with VMRO as a negative, having come to see VMRO as being an ethnically chauvinistic and highly corrupt party. As a result, down to the last minute, those negotiations did not produce a coalition.

At that point, Zoran Zaev, the leader of the Social Democrats, as the leader of the second-largest party in parliament, claimed the right to receive the mandate to begin coalition talks from President Gjorge Ivanov. The president refused to give the mandate, however, stating that he believed Zaev was willing to negotiate with the Albanian parties on the basis of a policy document that Ivanov claimed was drafted in Albania, and that he claimed presented a threat to the sovereignty and security of Macedonia.

This provoked a very tense constitutional crisis that dragged on for several months, as VMRO engaged in a long-term filibuster in parliament and pro-VMRO civic groups held large demonstrations on a daily basis in Skopje and other cities throughout the country. So although Zaev had a two-seat majority, together with DUI and the Alliance for Albanians, in essence for late winter and early spring, politics here were deadlocked.

Then, on April 27th, the deputies from those three parties stayed after the closing of a session of the parliament and voted in DUI's Talat Xhaferi as speaker – by the way, the first time an ethnic Albanian has held such a senior post in the government here. The election took place at about six in the evening, just as the daily pro-VMRO crowd was arriving at parliament, and a mob of several hundred broke into the parliament, and assaulted leading members of the new coalition and journalists.

Following this violence, President Ivanov relented and granted Zaev the mandate, and by the end of May, SDSM, DUI, and the Alliance had formed a new government. The government announced a very ambitious series of domestic reforms and a major effort to improve relations with the country's neighbors. Symbolically, the foreign minister's first trip out of the country was to Athens, where he expressed a desire to work with Greece towards resolution of the longstanding name dispute the Bob referenced in his introduction. All of these efforts are aimed at paving the way to achieving the new government's strategic goal, which is to reopen the country's integration process with European and Euro-Atlantic structures that has essentially been frozen since the Bucharest NATO Summit in 2008.

Just these last couple of weeks, the country held municipal elections. The main story of these elections in the first round was VMRO's poor showing. In their first elections as an opposition party in a decade, the party received 25 percent fewer votes than it had last December. SDSM won the mayorships in Skopje, almost all of the major ethnic Macedonian majority municipalities, and even in many of the rural almost solidly Macedonian municipalities that had up until now been strongholds of VMRO.

DUI saw only a small increase in their share of the votes from last December. But with support from SDSM and fractured opposition from the other Albanian parties, in the first round their candidates made it through to the runoffs in all of the major Albanian municipalities.

The second round was held just this past Sunday, and the results are still preliminary as we are awaiting the adjudication by the State Electoral Commission of complaints. But it appears that these trends continued as SDSM won 17 of 19 races in which they were head-to-head with VMRO, and DUI won in most of the runoffs its candidates ran in, although the Alliance for Albanians did win in one major municipality. ODIHR election observers found the two rounds of elections to be generally competitive with unbiased coverage by the media and reasonably well-administered.

VMRO, on the other hand, has denounced these elections as extremely unfair and said that they will refuse to recognize the results of the elections. Nevertheless, I want to stress that ODIHR found only isolated instances of misuse of administrative resources and vote-buying.

These elections, coming as they did only six months into the life of the new coalition, have roiled the political scene here. But going forward, it appears at this point that SDSM and DUI will have no problem in finding the votes they need to maintain their majority in parliament and return to the reform agenda.

So let me now turn to the role of the OSCE, and particularly of our mission over the last year. During the tense days this winter, the OSCE was urging all sides to work democratically and peacefully to resolve the crisis. The secretary-general and the special representative of the chairman-in-office both made visits here to reinforce that message. For our part, the mission closely monitored the situation on the ground, including the protests, the situation in parliament, and what appeared to be a politically-motivated attack on a large number of important civil-society organizations in the community.

With the election of the new government, we have turned our focus to coordinating with the new local authorities on how best we can support the reform process in line with our mandate and with the host country's OSCE commitments. Among the government's top reform priorities are reforms in the area of rule of law, law enforcement, the electoral system, freedom of expression and the media, increasing the role of parliament, and further implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement which was signed in 2001 to end the intercommunal violence in the country.

We have put together our plan for 2018 with those priorities in mind. Those plans – which I have to say are tentative pending final approval of our budget by participating states,

including the United States – will allow us to continue to focus on building cohesive interethnic relations, with particular emphasis on the area of education and youth. We will continue to support democratization and public administration reform, with a focus on enhancing institutional capacities both on the central and on the local levels; increasing adherence to democratic governance principles; and further efforts to improve the capacity of the government to freely and fairly administer elections. We will continue our long-term work in the areas of tolerance and nondiscrimination, hate speech, and hate crime. The mission will support efforts to implement reforms to increase the independence of the judiciary, with a focus on transparency and access to justice. We will continue, as we have for several years, to monitor high-profile court cases, including those that have the potential to inflame interethnic tensions and those being brought via the special prosecutor that was called into being in 2015 to investigate alleged crimes that were apparent in the illegal tape recordings that were released by the opposition.

Historically, another major part of our work has been and will continue to be implementing work on democratic policing and improving the professionalization of the police. This includes working on improving accountability, transparency, and improving policing skills.

We will continue to support and provide expertise to address transnational threats, high among them fighting organized crime, the threat of violent extremism, and trafficking in persons that has been in large part associated with the migration crisis that had a major effect here two years ago.

We hope to add new streams of work this year, bearing in mind the changes here on the ground. The first is support for the parliament. One of the things that's become apparent is that the parliament needs to increase its capacity to provide effective oversight over the administrative branch and to hold the executive accountable. We will also be working to promote freedom of speech and of the media, with a focus on improving the safety of journalists and improving media literacy.

As Bob mentioned, we are proud to be the oldest field operation in the OSCE. We'll be celebrating our 25th anniversary this month, and we look forward to year 26. I think we have a real opportunity in which we can, working with the local authorities, working with Ambassador Peško and the other institutions of the OSCE, and working with our international colleagues here on the ground, to support positive change in this country.

Thank you very much.

HAND: OK, thank you very much, Jeff. And before we go to our next speaker, I just want to confirm: You can hear us?

GOLDSTEIN: Yes, I can hear you fine. Thanks, Bob.

HAND: That's good.

Well, if the Mission to Skopje was at the beginning of OSCE field activity, the Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina brought that activity to a whole new level of prominence and capacity,

given the task it faced to assist implementation of the 1995 Dayton Agreement, starting with election administration and local confidence-building efforts, and moving to education and so much more. The Mission to Bosnia has always been led by an American, as was the Mission to Skopje in its early years. Indeed, the first head of both of these missions was the late Ambassador Robert Frowick, a truly effective diplomat for whom I had the opportunity to work many times.

Jonathan Moore, our next panelist, I believe also worked with Ambassador Frowick, and has now followed in his footsteps by being the head of the mission in Sarajevo until September of this year. Jonathan not only has a fresh perspective on the Balkans; he also has a wealth of previous experience, and we are glad to welcome him back to a Commission event. Jonathan?

MOORE: Thank you very much.

I could go through a long list of the distinguished members of the audience who are present. Thank you all very much for being here. Especially pleased to see colleagues from the region and from the State Department on their way to the region.

Let me say I'm particularly grateful to the Helsinki Commission members and staff, of course, for the honor of being here and for your continued interest, especially through Bob Hand, and focus on the Western Balkans. And thank you again for the very important May 2016 hearing on corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I do have to offer some caveats. I should note that the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, as Bob said, has been in the hands of my distinguished successor, fellow American diplomat Ambassador Bruce Berton, since the beginning of September. As requested by the Commission, my remarks today are based on my three-year tenure there. The views I express here are my own, not necessarily those of the U.S. government or the OSCE. I am not appearing here in my capacity as a U.S. Foreign Service officer. No animals were harmed in the preparation of my remarks. (Laughter.) I think that covers everything.

So, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina established through Dayton in 1995 has an extensive network of nine offices throughout the country, 320 dedicated professional staff, and works every day with people in local communities as well as the most senior political leaders, and everyone in between to help keep the peace, protect fundamental rights, ensure the rule of law, and build prosperity.

The mission has a uniquely deep and broad mandate. The framework for OSCE activities is grounded in the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords. Dayton and the constitution contained in it continue to serve as a key foundation for Bosnia and Herzegovina and its citizens.

The Dayton Accords gave the mission a special role in conducting and observing elections. The mission's role, of course, over the years has evolved. The Central Election Commission took on the responsibility of running elections in 2002. With the goal of helping the country achieve its OSCE commitments and integration aspirations, the mission has used its

diverse and active field presence to engage in a variety of areas, seeking and keeping very close ties with institutions, organizations, and individuals at all levels of society.

Recalling the mission's successful efforts and impact during my mandate, I would highlight three main areas: education, rule of law, and countering violent extremism. And I will also note the mission's positive political role.

Talking about education first and foremost, which is a tremendous area of interest and concern, there is both segregation and discrimination in the education sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A concrete example of the mission's work was its immediate response to the secondary-school students in Jajce, who joined forces in the summer of 2016 to block the creation of a new segregated school. With the OSCE mission leading the efforts of the international community, we engaged both publicly and privately over months and at multiple levels to prevent the first new case of educational segregation in the country since 2002. The story gained national and international attention. While it is important to keep watching the matter – because, as we know, nothing is ever solved forever – working together, we convinced the authorities at multiple levels to make other steps instead of splitting the students. The ultimate credit goes, of course, to the students themselves, who showed incredible tolerance, maturity, and commitment to a common future.

With regard to rule of law, for years the mission has worked to bring justice to victims and survivors of war crimes. In June 2016, the mission released a detailed, hard-hitting analytical report on the state-level processing of war crimes, where there have been a number of deficiencies. The analysis was hailed for its insight and practical recommendations – with a little bit of flak, but I won't get into that now. Again, the mission brought about concrete results. The recommendations are, indeed, being implemented both by the state court and the prosecutor's office of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And I'd like to say, with thanks to the U.S. government, the mission has embarked upon a similar effort to improve the quality of processing corruption cases.

Bob, thank you very much for mentioning the terrorist attack in New York yesterday. This is something on all of our minds. Bosnia and Herzegovina has suffered four terrorist attacks over the past seven years, including the 2011 attack on the U.S. embassy in Sarajevo. The country's authorities are working to do what they can, but we all recognize Bosnia and Herzegovina is vulnerable. Given the deep scars left by the war, terrorist attacks could greatly damage the stability of the country by leading to acts of revenge and, therefore, a growing cycle of conflict.

The OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina takes advantage of its grassroots-level involvement throughout the country. As in other areas, we see clear evidence of the essential role played by local communities. Having helped establish a series of over 30 coalitions against hate, local communities are natural allies in building mutual respect and joint community values. These are locally-constituted groups of individuals and NGOs dedicated to working with each other as neighbors to emphasize common rights, and build broader respect and understanding.

The April 2015 terrorist attack in Zvornik, which happened just two days before the visit of then-Chairman-in-Office and Foreign Minister of Serbia Ivica Dačić, came as a shock to all of us in the region and around the world. But we learned a very valuable lesson: The local coalition there, together with the mayor and the Islamic community, with one voice called immediately for calm and tolerance, opposing any acts of revenge.

Given that example and building on a project funded by the U.S. government, the mission integrated the fight against violent extremism into its efforts as a permanent element of the security cooperation team, one joined by colleagues from across the mission. The U.S. government has also developed scenario-based multi-stakeholder seminars to provide collaboration and disseminate good practices. With U.S. government support, we conducted a very successful tabletop exercise early last year building international coordination, but also whole-of-society coordination and collaboration inside the country. The OSCE mission is following up on these efforts, and is engaging with youth and local community leaders on CVE well into next year.

Let me just talk about the mission's effectiveness and the political context. The mission continues to build capacities at all levels, within its budget, and speak candidly about both opportunities and obstacles. Bosnia has many of both. The mission proves its effectiveness and the depth of its engagement again and again. Key factors include the diverse, expert, motivated workforce – women and men from across the country and many OSCE-participating states; the large network of field office(s) allows for constant outreach, is flexible and tailored to practical opportunities, and helps build enduring local contacts; the extensive media engagement that the mission has, which is fostered by a pattern of access to and for the press and defense of media freedom; as well as recognition by the public that the mission does not shy away from difficult tasks and topics, whether at the national or local level.

The strength of the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be summed up as credibility with everyone, presence everywhere, access to everyone, engagement with everyone. This helps to bring about results. In this building and on this Hill, we can talk about “all politics is local,” and grammatically or otherwise it's certainly true. Or, if you prefer, think globally, act locally. That is exactly what the mission is all about. Even in the political sphere, where we helped partisan adversaries build coalitions after the 2014 elections, helped defend the country's constitutional order against attacks from within, and calmed local tensions, interethnic tensions, both in Srebrenica and Stolac in 2016, it is evident that the OSCE mission can make and has made an important and positive impact.

In conclusion, let me just say what I said when I left Sarajevo, to offer my deep thanks to all the members of the team of the OSCE mission, the Helsinki Commission, and many others, including the Serbian chairmanship that supported our work, the secretariat in Vienna – thanks to Marcel Peško. I'm glad to be here and look forward to hearing your questions.

HAND: Thank you very much, Jonathan.

Keeping the chronological order, the Mission to Serbia was created after the other two, and only after the ouster of Slobodan Milošević from power in late 2000 made it possible. Over

time, it, too, has adapted to Serbia's changing needs as the country seeks to move beyond a dark chapter in its history.

An American has, thus far, always held the deputy position on the mission, just as in Bosnia it's been the head of mission. And most recently it was our next panelist, Michael Ueyehara. I mention the American leadership on these three missions to underscore the importance the United States has traditionally attached to their work. Mike is also a friend of the Helsinki Commission throughout his career at the State Department, especially given his focus on human rights issues. I welcome you to this briefing today, Mike, and turn it over to you.

UYEHARA: Thank you, Bob.

Dear distinguished members and staff of the Helsinki Commission, current and former colleagues of the OSCE, honorable representatives of the diplomatic corps, ladies and gentlemen, I have worked closely, as Bob said, with the Helsinki Commission since 2001, when I was a Belarus Desk officer at the Department of State; and then continuing on during subsequent assignments at the U.S. embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine; as an office director in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; and most recently with the OSCE Mission to Serbia. During these assignments, I have become increasingly more impressed with the role played by the Helsinki Commission, a unique institution drawing together the executive and legislative branches, and bringing together the Senate and House of Representatives from both sides of the aisle.

As the deputy head of the OSCE mission, I traveled widely through Serbia and took the opportunity to speak at American corners in the country on the topic of the U.S. within the OSCE and the OSCE's role in support of Serbia's development. Most of my audience were young, often university students or younger, and attending my talk to have the opportunity to hear a native English speaker. To break the ice, I would ask each member of my audience what they already knew about the OSCE. I was disappointed that the majority's answer was either I don't know about the OSCE or that the OSCE promotes security and cooperation. (Laughter.) Given this level of ignorance about the role of the OSCE in a country where the OSCE has a mission, I am grateful to the Helsinki Commission, and particularly Bob Hand, for arranging an opportunity to publicize and to promote knowledge of the really great things that the OSCE, through its missions – what the OSCE refers to as field operations – does, specifically in the Western Balkans.

I should first emphasize that I offer my remarks as a private individual. And not surprisingly, the following language will be almost precisely the same as what Jonathan offered. I no longer have a connection to the OSCE. And while I remain an employee of the State Department, the views I express here are my own and not necessarily a reflection of U.S. policy, either toward the OSCE, or towards the Balkans region broadly and Serbia specifically. That said, my observations and conclusions will probably not differ greatly from that my former boss, Italian diplomat Andrea Orizio, might provide in his annual report to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna.

You've already had the opportunity to hear from Jonathan Moore and Jeff Goldstein, both whom I have known for many years, so you already have an understanding of the role of the OSCE missions. Just like the other two OSCE field operations, the OSCE to Serbia's programs and activities are based on its mandate, part of the decision establishing it. Thus, it's worthwhile to cite it here. The version that I will read incorporates changes to the mandate's language appropriate to the June 2006 decision designating the mission as the Mission to Serbia after Montenegro's declaration of independence.

The relevant portion of the decision to establish the mission states: "The mission, acting in close cooperation with the government of the Republic of Serbia, will provide assistance and expertise to the Serbian authorities at all levels, as well as to interested individuals, groups, and organizations in the fields of democratization and the protection of human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. In this context, and in order to promote democratization, tolerance, and the rule of law, and conformity with OSCE principles, standards, and commitments, the mission will also assist and advise on the full implementation of legislation in areas covered by the mandate, and monitor the proper functioning and development of democratic institutions, processes and mechanisms. In particular, the mission will assist in the restructuring and training of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. In addition, the mission will provide assistance and advice in the field of the media."

The OSCE mission's structure reflects the mandate. It has four programmatic departments: for democratization, for rule of law and human rights, for security cooperation, and for media. Briefly, the OSCE mission seeks to help Serbia build strong, independent, accountable, and effective democratic institutions. To do so, the mission works with government institutions, civil society, and the media in its mandated areas. It also works with other missions in the region on joint projects and initiatives.

The OSCE Mission to Serbia has a robust presence in the country, with a staff of about 130 people. This puts the mission on a par with the EU Delegation, and makes it much larger than most bilateral embassies. While the OSCE mission comprises a mix of international and local staff, with the international staff accounting for about 20 percent of total staffing, the OSCE mission's particular strength is its local employees. While their remuneration is competitive and generous, my personal impression is that the local staff are enthusiastic in carrying out their duties because they are, in the main, Serbian patriots. As patriots, they believe in the OSCE mission's work, and are deeply committed to the mission's objective of helping Serbia to advance politically and to overcome the legacy of the past.

Through its programs, the OSCE mission continues to provide added value in its core mandated fields through advice and expertise to its local partners to assist Serbia in becoming a rule-based, democratic society where professionalism, accountability, and meritocracy are deeply-rooted, and where the rights of every individual are protected by an independent and effective judiciary deriving its authority from a full separation of powers. The principles of partnership with the host country and national ownership of accomplishments guides the mission's work in helping Serbia achieve full sustainability of its reform results. Adequate buy-in from the Serbian authorities, and their full participation in the development and implementation of mission programs, ensure that the programs are targeted and topical.

My description of the OSCE mission's work perhaps still remains rather general and abstract. To bring the accomplishments of the OSCE mission into focus, I shall describe two areas of the OSCE mission's work in more detail: the new countering violent extremism project and the Follow Us initiative.

For quite some time during my assignment, I was frustrated by the scant attention that international donors were paying to the issue of countering violent extremism – CVE – in Serbia. International donor attention to the Balkans was focused on Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there were cases of terrorist violence that underscored CVE's relevance. My argument, however, was that the violent extremism threat in Serbia was not zero. I would argue with various interlocutors and potential donors that an ounce of prevention was worth a pound of cure. Just because Serbia did not have a problem now, we should be carrying out projects strategically to counter violent extremism so that we would not have a problem in the future.

Thankfully, the U.K. government saw an intersection with a new funding mechanism and the CVE issue, which resulted in an offer to fund a CVE project for the OSCE mission to implement. We ran with the vague U.K. expression of interest to develop a full-fledged project. Rather than focusing on Muslim-majority areas, taking heed of local leaders' concerns not to be stigmatized simply for being Muslim, we proposed a project that was national in scope and took into consideration all manifestations of violent extremism, including threats from Serbian right-wing nationalism, some of whose supporters had joined the Russian-backed insurgency in eastern Ukraine.

Realizing that we should not channel our CVE activities in any specific OSCE mission department, but that the CVE activities needed to encompass the broad mandate of the – of the mission, we positioned the management and execution of the project in the Office of the Head of Mission, which would allow the project manager to work and – to task and work with all departments. This approach allowed us to tackle the problem with a multi-faceted approach, which addresses primarily youth alienation in all its manifestations.

The OSCE mission supports the Follow Us initiative started by the mission to bring together prominent women, particularly women parliamentarians from Belgrade and Pristina. In addition to providing financial support in cooperation with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo for a meeting of the – meetings of the two groups, the OSCE mission commissioned a documentary, available in varying lengths, to promote the accomplishments of the group and the benefit of having women from opposite communities speak to each other. The documentary has been screened for several audiences in both Serbia and Kosovo.

The Follow Us initiative's participants most recently developed an action plan and an objective that includes mentoring the next generation of Serbia and – Serbian and Kosovo women leaders. As a result of their decision, the OSCE Missions to Serbia and in Kosovo funded a group of young women from Belgrade and Pristina to organize a caravan, where they as a group visited regional cities in Serbia and Kosovo to describe the impact of the program bringing them together to connect simply as people.

Using the Follow Us initiative as a template, the OSCE mission is also organizing a regional conference in Belgrade of women parliamentarians to allow them to discuss their common issues as women and as politicians.

During the course of my adult career, I have worked basically for two organizations. For nearly 10 years, I was an enlisted soldier and an officer in the U.S. Army. And then, for slightly more than 30 years, I've been a Foreign Service officer in the State Department. My secondment to the OSCE mission was a unique foray into another organizational environment. I had the opportunity to work with talented and accomplished people of many nationalities, with dedicated and enthusiastic Serbians, and to gain an appreciation for the value of multinational diplomacy. I am honored to have the opportunity to speak to you, but I'm also deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to work at the OSCE Mission to Serbia, one of the real highlights of a long and rewarding career.

Thank you for your attention.

HAND: Thank you very much, Mike. That was a great statement. And thanks especially for your compliments to the Commission and the work that we try to do here on Capitol Hill.

UYEHARA: Well deserved.

HAND: To remind us that the OSCE missions in the Western Balkans are supported not only by the United States, but by many of our European partners as well, we finally have Ambassador Marcel Peško from the Conflict Prevention Centre of the OSCE Secretariat on our panel. We are very fortunate to have him here in Washington. He was attending what I think was a very successful two-day conference on security matters, specifically what is known as the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, and he agreed to lengthen his stay to be with us today. He can present the view of the missions from the perspective of Vienna, and he can say some additional words about those missions that are not covered by our other panelists here. I welcome this additional input very much. The floor is yours, Ambassador.

PEŠKO: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here. I really appreciate that the Helsinki Commission has invited me as one of the contributors to this discussion, trying to provide the perspective from the Secretariat, from the Conflict Prevention Centre on our work in Southeast Europe or Western Balkans. And I must say I really appreciate the deepness of commitment on the side of Helsinki Commission when it comes to dealing with the OSCE business in the field. It would hard to find anywhere in the OSCE area people that are committed and that knowledgeable about what's going on in the OSCE and how our missions contribute to our common endeavors. So I really appreciate that this institution is here, and I would find it as one of the core platform(s) for the OSCE's cooperation. So thank you for that, and we will be always ready and happy to respond to the invitations to come here and share our views with you.

Talking about Southeast Europe without looking at the broader situation in the OSCE area would not be appropriate. I mean, we have to recognize that we have a very polarized and fragmented situation when it comes to European security order. If you come to Vienna today, you would find that participating states do not conduct dialogue; they conduct sets of monologues. And you will find it's really difficult to find common ground today. And we all know that this is related to the situation in the east of Ukraine, to that conflict, which exacerbates these divisions among participating States. This is related to the violation of fundamental principles on which our organization and our concept of comprehensive and indivisible security is based. Simply, we don't have common ground today when it comes to the OSCE and when it comes to the European security order, and we don't know where this all can lead.

So, in that context, it's very important that we continue to maintain our coherent work in the Southeast European region. And therefore, I would like to highlight the importance of our presence there. Those are our representatives when it comes to dealing with local governments, with local societies. Those are our contact points when it comes to implementing OSCE's policies. And it is, therefore, very important to maintain support for their work – political support but also budgetary support and in-kind support.

Looking at the strategic perspective of our field operations, obviously, the focus has shifted towards the special monitoring mission in Ukraine. But it's very important that we continue to keep Southeast Europe very high on our agenda. I think this was one of the reasons why we have seen over the last several years a certain stagnation in the reform process in that region.

And we are happy to see today that there is a reinvigorated focus on the side of the European Union, on the side of NATO, but also U.N. Just recently I had trilateral consultations with the EU and the U.N., and there is clearly now a stronger focus on the region and interest to address the current challenges the region is facing.

Of course, the OSCE's presences have been there for some time. And their original mission was to address the conflict, to stabilize the situation, and to help the nations to come out from the conflicts and rebuild their nations in a new environment. And I think, as you said, Bob, that we have achieved a lot of positive results in that area. But what we need is to have a reinvigorated commitment to the region, and we need to respond to the current challenges which are there.

And let me be frank on that. We have been seeing recently a resurfacing of the nationalistic narratives, for instance. We have seen deterioration of some bilateral relations. We have seen also a weakening, or not strengthening, of democratic institutions. There are issues, continued issues, with the media and freedom of expressions in some participating States. And overall, this is overshadowed by insufficient or weak economic growth in the region, a high level of unemployment, particularly among young populations. And also, a weakening of the role of parliament or not strengthening the role of parliament in some participating States in the region.

So there are challenges, ongoing challenges. The countries are going in the right direction, but they continue to have issues, which I think the international community should continue to address. And as my predecessors already spoke about the need to strengthen the rule of law, good governance to strengthen the economic environment to deal with these transnational threats of organized crime, radicalization, foreign fighters, of course migration and its implications on the region. So the agenda is full.

What I want to stress is that we really need to refocus and, in cooperation with the host governments, to identify, to fine-tune this agenda to their needs so that we work towards strengthening their own ownership. And I think this is exactly what's going on during the last weeks and months.

Just recently, we had a meeting of our heads of missions in the region. And we have identified these priorities as our top priorities. And we are now refining our programmatic work in Montenegro. You have heard from Jeff also in Macedonia. We are refocusing where we think that the OSCE could provide more added value. With Serbia, I think we have a quite effective program of work. And I could continue also with Albania and with Pristina authorities as well.

At the same time, what we are now focusing on more is capacity building, so it's more long term in order to strengthen the resilience of government structures and the civil society to be able to address and cope with the challenges that are there in front of them.

And, of course, over the years there have been areas where we have also phased out our cooperation. Let me also be frank about it. The OSCE is not there forever, or at its size. It should not be there forever as it is. Our strength is in our flexibility. So it's about how we are able to identify these needs and how we would accommodate with our response. Before, we were much more focused on political, military aspects when it comes to dealing with the aftermath of the war, when it comes to standardizing the processes of stockpiling of the small arms and light weapons, for instance, modernizing the armed forces, creating regional cooperation or grounds for the regional cooperation.

Let me just remind you that this is now on the governments in the region to continue the implementation of Article IV of the Dayton Agreement, for instance, which deals with confidence and security-building measures in that area where the Secretariat and the CPC provides only the facilitating role. So what we would like really to have is very practical cooperation with the governments and understanding where the OSCE can and should continue providing a good value for them in their reform agenda.

And there is a need to stress that there are very strong reform-oriented ambitions in each of these participating States. They are, of course, linked with their Euro-Atlantic and European accession ambitions. Some of them, like Montenegro, recently joined the NATO; some of them continue to strengthen their capabilities to deal with their EU accession role.

And, of course, we are not an implementing agency for the EU. But what the OSCE is trying to do is to form our programmatic work in order to strengthen the capacities of the host government in the areas where it can help them to progress to fulfill the EU criteria as well.

But what I think needs to be highlighted is that the international community should really focus on the reform agenda in the countries and tailor this support to their needs. And in that context, we have seen a recently increased focus by the European Union as well on the region. And this is a welcomed development, because I think what the region has lost over a couple of years, a recent couple of years, is a sense of orientation. In a way, sort of a new impetus when it comes to the vision of the region was needed.

And recently, we have seen repeated engagements by the European Commission, by the address of the state of the union of Mr. Juncker when he pointed to the need to reinvigorate the process of accession of Western Balkans countries to the EU. So that's the positive development, and we need to maintain this impetus also with the OSCE's role.

Of course, at the same time, one cannot ignore the geopolitics which are there. We have seen recently geopolitical narratives when it comes to the results of elections in Montenegro, for instance. We have seen also these geopolitical assessments or interventions in Macedonia prior to the elections and also after the elections. I am just raising that which I think is also necessary, that the key actors use also the OSCE platform to reunite their positions over the Balkans. Simply, these divisive narratives and perspectives is not helpful when it comes to the furthering of the reforms and reconciliation in that region. And simply, we need to be open about that as well.

So I will stop here. As I said, a lot of work in front of the OSCE, the need for engagement with local governments, create ownership and have a tailored agenda for each state we are working with, including when it comes to strengthening the rule of law, good governance, public administration, fighting corruption, and economic issues, unemployment.

There is a future, of course, for our work, but we need to also phase out where we see that the capacities have been already put in place. What the region needs: reassurance and support for implementing their vision to become modern, prosperous and stable countries.

And we need to address these issues of those grievances which have resurfaced and which are recently also shown that they can very dynamically change the atmosphere in the region immediately as they appear, and reengage with the leaders into the dialogue, like, for instance, now we have seen the invigorated progress in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. But we also see a need for having closer dialogue between Zagreb and Belgrade as well and really create a sort of sense of regional responsibility and togetherness that the region is working on the same agenda and going in the same direction.

HAND: All right, thank you very much, Ambassador.

At this point, we'll get into the discussion period where people can make some very brief comments – and I would ask people to keep them brief – or if they have a question to ask. And I

won't use my prerogative as the moderator to ask the first question. I usually like it when people in the audience ask my questions for me, so I'll wait and see what is out there.

Instead, what I would do is try to structure our conversation a little bit. I would like to give those diplomatic representatives of the countries that we're discussing today, the Western Balkans, that are here in the audience an opportunity to make a brief comment about how their country views the mission that they host, the work of the OSCE missions in their neighboring countries and the work of the OSCE generally.

Let me give those that I ask to make a comment in that regard a couple of minutes, though, and first turn to someone in the audience who knows the OSCE very well, but also knows the Balkans very well, Dr. Michael Haltzel of Johns Hopkins SAIS, who I know needs to leave in a few minutes.

And so I'm going to break protocol and let Mike ask the first question or make the first comment so that when he needs to leave he has his questions answered.

Q: Well, thank you. Thank you, Bob. And I really hate to be ahead of diplomatic friends like Djerdj – sitting in front of me.

I'm going to begin with embarrassing you and several other people in the audience. We are here at the Congress. The walls are thick, but perhaps there are representatives from the staffs here. And I would just like to echo what Jonathan and other people have said about the value of the Helsinki Commission.

I've been fortunate enough to lead several U.S. government delegations to multiweek OSCE meetings, and in that capacity had several members of the Helsinki Commission – Bob among them, and Orest, and other people I've seen here – as members of the delegation. And I've worked with you in Washington also. And honestly, the American people should be very grateful to have public servants like you folks. I've never encountered more expertise and a better work ethic than the people in the Helsinki Commission.

So you folks in Congress, in that direction, if you're listening I would hope you would factor, for what they're worth, these comments into your budgetary discussions.

I also am a great fan and believer in the OSCE. And I think that, first in the CSCE and then OSCE, it's been a remarkable, on balance, success story. But I think it's fair to say that no organization is uniformly good or bad, and the record is uneven. And some of you have discussed that certainly the Permanent Council, which, as Marcel has said, more often than not has broken down into talking past each other.

I think that the field missions stand out as one of the most successful elements, maybe the most but certainly on par with a few others in the OSCE in terms of what they have accomplished. And I am going to ask a question in spite of my long introduction, and I'm going to take up where Jonathan left off.

He was talking about the advantages that the field missions have, credibility, presence, access and engagement. And then several people talked about the monitoring functions. I think Mike did, and Jeff. And, of course, from monitoring you get the next step of publicizing what the national governments, the participating States, have or have not done.

My question is simply this. The glaring weakness of the OSCE, in spite of all the successes, has been the lack of an enforcement mechanism. Everybody knows this, this is a fact of life. You have to work around that. My question is, to the best of your ability in a public forum, if you could perhaps tell us what carrots and sticks you have at your disposal.

Jonathan, of course, could work with the High Representative in Bosnia and the Dayton powers and there are other special things in a few other countries. Marcel talked about EU accession. The OSCE is not an arm of the EU, but you could help. And there is, of course, NATO, with the recent case, terrific case, of Montenegro. But basically, other than name and shame, what kind of sticks do you have? You know, you could work behind the scenes and build relationships with local politicians.

So that's my question. You talk about effectiveness, you have a great track record, but you haven't gotten everything you wanted or we wouldn't have the flaws that come out every year at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, or "HDIM." I mean, everybody knows that the United States doesn't live up to all its commitments. So if you could give us an idea of what carrots and sticks you have been able to use to further the OSCE agenda, I'd be grateful. Thank you.

HAND: Thank you, Mike.

Who would like to be the first to respond to Mike's question?

MOORE: I can touch on it. Thank you for the opportunity, Mike. And thank you for being here. I'm very happy to see many familiar faces.

Name and shame is a big part of it. As part of your question, you said that we shouldn't look to that so much. One of the reasons why it's so important for the mission to engage with everyone everywhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina is so you can point out the good stories. So getting as much public attention to the good stories is important, and then getting public attention to the bad stories where there's failure, where there are problems, where there are conflicts.

So, frankly, over the three years I was head of mission, we worked very hard to expand our media team to work with the media, not just to support them on the principle of media freedom, but to get them with us. Most media outlets, whether public or private, in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not very well funded, they do not have many staff out in the area. So we started paying to take them to where the stories were. Some of the best stories and some of the worst stories in Bosnia and Herzegovina are in fairly rural areas, even below the levels of municipalities.

So the force of public attention to what was actually happening both as opportunities and problems was something where we played a direct role. The budget is now large, the team is 320 people. We were able, with a very professional media operation, to actually bring media attention directly so that instead of just talking about issues, we were showing, demonstrating and working on them.

In terms, however, of political consequences, that's a very different topic. That's certainly not something we as a mandate had the opportunity to do, trying to engage with a variety of very difficult actors who one day are helping you do a job and the next day are blocking you at every turn, who are assisting in one area and then in another are talking about separation or, as I mentioned in my remarks, challenging the constitutional order of the country. And yet, you need some of those same people to work with you to get other things done.

That, in the context of being a field mission and the work of OSCE as an institution to bring about specific sanctions or consequences, was not really an opportunity for us. But to direct positive energies and negative energies to challenge institutions when they were not doing their job – like the office of the prosecutor, who was failing to do a good job of getting war crimes processed; the issues in Stolac, where a candidate for mayor assaulted other people exactly on election day – there are a lot of direct challenges we had to engage. But more the force of argument than the argument of force.

HAND: Let me quickly ask, Jeff, did you want to respond at all? I know in the past year that you probably wish you had lots of carrots and sticks to go through the difficulties Macedonia has faced. Did you want to comment?

GOLDSTEIN: Well, maybe just in general. I think we all have to bear in mind that all OSCE field operations are, with the exception of Kosovo, based in countries that are participating States in an organization that is a consensus organization. So they're not really here in a role of using sticks at all.

You know, I think that when some of our programmatic work is not going well, when we have felt that there was not the political will on the receiving end, one of the things that we have frequently done is stopped programming or change our focus. I wouldn't exactly call that a stick, but it's a reaction to what the real-world possibilities are in a given time and place.

And I agree completely with Mr. Peško that the biggest carrot we have is our ability to bring expertise to bear in forums that are a priority for a government at a particular time. And that's what we're hoping to do now.

HAND: OK, thank you.

Ambassador?

PEŠKO: Well, what I would say is that, indeed, the organization needs discussion about our field operations. Some of them have been established 20, 25 years ago without a change in mandate, however, with any change in focus. So the mandate provided a growth framework for

the work. And in fact, from the tools which were seen before as conflict response and conflict management presences, we have now in place presences which are dealing mainly with capacity building and strengthening of institutions on the site of our host countries.

And recent developments in Western Balkans demonstrated that positive trends cannot be taken for granted. There are still ongoing challenges which can turn very fast. So I have to also say that some of these presences continue to maintain their early-warning and early-response capabilities.

We have reporting tools. Missions are regularly reporting to participating States. And this, yes, in fact puts the respective host countries on the spot, and in fact their own internal developments and implementation of reform agenda is exposed to all other participating states. We have to be clear about that. It's not sticks and carrots, but these participating States are more exposed when it comes to their own developments and own coping with the challenges as opposed to those who do not host field operations.

And what the OSCE needs really is to have a good conceptual debate of how we have moved from the early '90s to now when we really try to refocus our work on the needs of all these participating states. So what we are trying to do is really to strengthen the sense of ownership of our work. You know, that's the difference, as Jeff said, between, let's say, us and the EU or NATO, that we are owned by the host participating States. So we are not working with sticks, we are trying to engage.

And what we can offer is, as Jonathan said, local presence, developed network of contacts at all levels, long term, we are not coming and going. I mean, we are there and really developing and nurturing this environment with our host countries. And we are providing all kinds of expertise, and it's free of charge by the way for the host country. And the host country can identify where they see their weaknesses.

Let me just remind you that Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov was recently in Vienna addressing the Permanent Council. And he said very openly we want to do our reforms with you in order to achieve our vision. And the areas where we wanted to work with you is media freedom – we need to tackle hate speech and attacks against journalism – accountability and the rule of law, the role of civil society, law on languages, so we would like to use the OSCE to recreate the sense of togetherness and to address the ethnic divisions within the country. And this is exactly where the OSCE can help in a soft way, in an inclusive way, using different tools.

We don't have only missions, we have the High Commission on National Minorities, we are also dealing with these issues where we have freedom of media representative. We have ODIHR, who is regularly observing the elections, but also coming with their recommendations. And we are following up with these recommendations together with the local host country trying to achieve their implementation.

So I think that this sort of stigmatization is still somewhere in the atmosphere, but it's now we are trying to move towards really a shared responsibility and shared ownership concept of the field operations, particularly in the Southeastern Europe region.

HAND: OK. Thank you.

Before turning to Michael Uyhara for a comment that he would want to make on this question, I just want to sort of echo the point that you made about the OSCE being a partner with the host countries and their governments, and about the expertise that the OSCE can provide them and that they themselves acknowledge that they want. I think this is one thing which may distinguish, relatively speaking, the missions in the Balkans from OSCE missions elsewhere, where I think some of the participating States that host missions or offices want the OSCE to be there at their whim; it's not really a two-way street. I appreciate with many of the Balkan countries the honesty with which they admit that they need help, and they don't view it necessarily as something to be embarrassed about or ashamed about, and that they make use of the OSCE and its expertise.

Of course, we'd like to see that go even further and have countries be more honest about their own records. But the countries in Southeast Europe, I think, relatively speaking, do a pretty good job of that. And I hope that it continues, despite the attacks on some of the OSCE missions that we see in other parts of the OSCE region.

Mike, would you like to make a comment?

UYEHARA: I would say that this question of the OSCE not having an enforcement mechanism is not such a large issue, because, for instance, the OSCE Mission to Serbia had its offices in the neighborhood of New Belgrade, and we happened to be right across the street from the Council of Europe office in a neighboring building. And you probably know that the Council of Europe has or the European Court of Human Rights has an enforcement mechanism based on the fact that Serbia and other countries are signatories to the European Convention on Human Rights. And these countries are regularly fined for violating the human rights of their citizens when they're brought to the court.

And what is clear, however, is the fact of these fines – and Serbia is one of the countries with the most cases brought to the European court – doesn't actually change their behavior. The countries just pay the fines. They're willing to accept that.

And so the threat of sanctions here doesn't necessarily lead to a change in behavior. And so you have to find the way to create this change of behavior. And I would also point out, in my written statement I note that Yugoslavia has been the subject of the only sanction available to the OSCE, which was suspension in the Permanent Council. And that was through the exercise of that consensus-minus-one principle, which was the only time that it's been exercised, which means that the threshold for the OSCE to apply this particular sanction is quite high. And it is quite properly is high.

And then to talk about the OSCE Mission to Serbia, not to put too fine a point on it, one of the carrots we have is money, right? So we can go to our partners and we can say if there is something that you really want to do, we can help you to do that. And then in particular with regard to, for example, the Ministry of Interior, the Italian government has provided them with a

case-management system, which allows them to track the money – the progress of cases with regard to money laundering and corruption.

And in order to be able to use this particular system, the OSCE mission was able to provide help in terms of adapting that Italian language-based system into a Serbian language-based system that the Serbian authorities could use. And that was a method for them to, first of all, tap into the modern IT developments to show that they have made this particular progress, but then also to become more effective. And they couldn't have done that without the OSCE mission.

And so I think that what is key here with regard to changing behavior also is the personal relationships and the institutional relationships that have been developed over time, and that the OSCE mission has this particular respectability and credibility with the Serbian authorities. And I think that we use that fairly effectively, things.

HAND: All right, thank you.

Let me now ask members of the diplomatic community from the countries we are discussing today whether they would like to make a comment. And I see the Serbian ambassador first.

Q: Thank you. I will stand here.

HAND: If you could introduce yourself.

Q: Yes, of course. I am Djerdj Matković, ambassador of the Republic of Serbia to the United States.

And, first of all, I would like to thank you, Bob, personally, and the members of the panel, for this very enlightening discussion and very useful comments which you have made. And the Helsinki Commission is very right in making these panels frequently, because it is important to keep the focus of the United States on the region. It needs some support from the United States, and we would like to have the positive impact from the U.S. and from other countries in our EU accession. And it's, I think, very important.

At the beginning, I'm sorry that I was a bit late. And as one of my professors at the university said, to compensate, I will have to leave a bit early. (Laughter.) I apologize for that. But I heard from Jonathan that you have mentioned, Bob, in the beginning the terrorist attack in New York, which is really very unfortunate. And we would like to express our deepest condolences to the people who lost their loved ones, and our prayers and our hearts goes out for them. And I hope the injured ones will recover very, very quickly.

Also, I would like to recognize and introduce my good friend and longtime friend, Roksanda Ninčić, who is our ambassador currently to the OSCE in Vienna. She has a long career in diplomacy and before she was in the media, a journalist. And she has made a great contribution to our work, I think, and our connection with the OSCE.

As far as the mission of the OSCE is in Serbia concerned, it was established in 2000, I think, 17 years ago. Although I heard that there are missions which are longer, we have a joke in Serbia that this OSCE mission is soon coming to almost 18 years.

At the beginning it was very useful cooperation, especially in the establishment of rule of law, judiciary. And in the internal affairs, we had excellent cooperation. And by years, the mission also evolved, in a sense, that had more and closer relations with the government and also excellent work with the communities, local communities, with the media and also with the nongovernmental organizations. So I think we should continue that cooperation.

And I think Ambassador Peško mentioned a very good thing, that the mandate of the mission, which was defined a long time ago, should be maybe a little bit adopted and to the new environment, the new conditions, because there are some things which we needed before, and now something else. For example, as Mr. Uyehara also mentioned, the fight against terrorism and organized crime.

Serbia was fortunate enough that we didn't have major terrorist attacks. But it doesn't mean that we are not prone to that. So I think we should work on that, preventing these things happen, although we have learned from this New York attack that it is very difficult to prevent such individual acts. But good cooperation and exchange of information is very important. And I hope that the mission will continue its work and cooperation with the Serbian government.

And I would like to thank you once again for organizing these events. We have managed to really go very far in our reforms and in our cooperation with the regional countries and partners. And it is our goal to continue these policies of regional reconciliation, including everybody into the EU, and connecting between our friends in political ways, economic, and also infrastructure.

So thank you once again for organizing this. Thank you.

HAND: Thank you, Ambassador.

Somebody else from the diplomatic community like to speak? No? OK. Well, you can always chime in later during the question-and-answer period as well with the general audience.

And let me now open it up to anybody who would like to ask a question of our panelists. Again, if you could start by identifying yourself and your affiliation, and then, if you have a comment, make it very, very brief, and then ask the question. Then let's try to keep the discussion moving. And I'll take two questions at a time. I don't like to go to three, because then one of them always gets forgotten. But I think if we go to just two at a time, we can try to manage it that way.

Over here and then back here. We'll go here first. I saw him first.

Q: Thank you. My name is Austin. I'm with United Macedonian Diaspora.

The question is, we mentioned the success of the Montenegrin example with their recent NATO membership. So I'm wondering what specific lessons could be extrapolated from that example and applied to Serbia or Bosnia or Macedonia? And in light of this success, could we see maybe a sort of potential institutional momentum, if you will? Will this kind of reignite the ambitions of the EU and NATO to look at the Western Balkans again and refocus their integration efforts? Thank you.

Q: Good morning. Alex Johnson with Open Society Policy Center.

I want to commend you all for all of your hard work, but want to shift to a more difficult question that I think Ambassador Peško and Bob started talking about and leading to this concept of the longevity of field operations.

With the recent closure of the office in Yerevan, despite the interest of the host government in maintaining that presence, are there any concerns with regards to the field operations in the Balkans in terms of their longevity? Thank you.

HAND: Who in our panelists would like to start with either one of those questions?
Jonathan?

MOORE: Well, first of all, on the issue of integration, citing Montenegro as an example, Bosnia and Herzegovina also aspires to be a member of the European Union and of NATO. That's been the case for over 10 years. There's a lot of domestic political debate about NATO membership, but that's a state capacity. And it was a member of the presidency who signed the letter 10 years ago that went to the then-secretary general in Brussels asking for consideration of NATO membership. It's a very long path.

And to give sort of a short answer, I would basically say that Montenegro is an excellent example of when you not only aspire for membership, but you meet the criteria, you can gain membership in the case of NATO. And in the case of the EU, they've managed to open quite a few chapters and I believe close a few. You do the work and you get the results. That's probably the best example that Montenegro would show Bosnia-Herzegovina.

With regard to the question from our colleague from Open Society – and thank you very much for that – with regard to our presences, I at no point felt any pressure or concern in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I talked about our credibility, our access and our engagement, as well as our presence. I hope that doesn't change after today. But at no point during my mandate then did I ever hear, why are you here? You need to close. You need to go. There are other targets in the international community I won't mention now who are under a lot of pressure to change what they do or simply to leave.

But one of our strengths is not just a deep and broad mandate that is tied to the Dayton peace accords. Many field missions don't have a mandate with that kind of foundation; but also the fact, of course, that our hosts, the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina and their

authorities, are very enthusiastic partners and are very glad we're there. We're fortunate for that. Making that apply to other countries would be a separate matter.

HAND: Jeff, I want to make sure – you can always wave your arm and somebody will point it out to me if you want to speak. But did you want to address these questions?

GOLDSTEIN: I am OK. Thank you.

HAND: Ambassador?

PEŠKO: Yes. Well, just recently we have seen a recommitment by the European Union to advance the work on the integration path of the whole region. I understand there was a meeting between Mogherini and Commissioner Hahn with the foreign ministers from the region in the – on the margins of the U.N. General Assembly – and there was a clear message towards that direction. And as I said also, Mr. Juncker, in his recent state of the union speech, mentioned this, that there is a need to reinforce work towards that direction. And this is at the same time linked with the reinforced focus on reforms in that countries.

And, at the same time, there is an ambition to strengthen the regional cooperation – not at the expense of the enlargement ambitions, but in a complementary way. Let me just remind you, the Berlin process, the Berdo/Briani process, there was a meeting in Trieste as well this year. So we are seeing these reinvigorated efforts in the region towards the direction.

At the same time, we are seeing bilateral issues. I mean, last year we had some issues when it comes to Pristina-Belgrade dialogue. We have seen some issues when it comes to the border between Montenegro and Kosovo still debated. We have seen disputes ongoing between Croatia and Slovenia. So let me be frank that there are these processes going on, and there is a need for a constant focus on these parallel processes to be facilitated by the international community.

So from my perspective, what the OSCE's role is, first of all, focusing on this reform agenda. The more reforms being implemented and being stabilized, the more prospects for these countries to move forward with their integration agenda they are.

And here I also see quite broad perspective for our future work here. As one of the actors providing the support, you know, there are some areas where OSCE support, given its regional presence, given its local expertise, given its longevity of presence, is perhaps more effective than the EU assistance. Or the same applies to the U.N. and UNDP and others. So it's also about the complementarity and synergies between the organizations who are active in that region.

So where I see some systemic issue, of course, is that, in terms of the future of the field operations, as I said, we need to have more conceptual debate about it. We have now – we have now seen challenges stemming from Mediterranean and from the south of Europe – migration, organized crime, of course, foreign fighters, radicalization. So this is where the organization is also focusing that and trying to strengthen its capacities to deal with that. And there is a

discussion about opening OSCE's presence in Italy, for instance, to address these Mediterranean challenges.

So I think this could be really helpful to overcome this sort of stigma type of feelings on the side of countries who are hosting our field operations today. So this is not homework for them. It's more the homework for those who don't have these presences. You know, if you ask me, I would really prefer that the OSCE is presented everywhere in the region, maybe with a small presence, with a surge capacity to really work on issues with the host countries where they are needed.

You know, there is no dispute about ODIHR working with Western countries, including here with the U.S. There was a quite robust presence here, a lot of recommendations when it comes to the election system here, and also engagement on the side of the U.S. But if you put, let's say, theoretically an idea of having a full-time presence here, that's another story. But we have to understand that these countries, after 25 years of development, including those in Central Asia, for instance, they have their different position in the international area. They have progress in many aspects.

So we really need to look how we could continue this inclusive and cooperative way of working with them, and also address this balance between those who host and those who do not host. And the discussion is going on. And the discussion is going on. The secretary general is going to organize a site event on the future of the field operations during the ministerial council. And there will be a Security Day event next year, next spring, on the future of the field operations as well in Vienna.

HAND: That's interesting to hear. I know we at the Helsinki Commission have ourselves at times thought of ways of revamping the way the OSCE does missions, perhaps to allow them to be regional so they're not confined to borders, because in the Balkans, for example, you need cross-border cooperation. Or perhaps to make the missions more issue-focused so that they could go perhaps even to all OSCE countries as needed.

Let me ask for two more questions from the audience; this gentleman right here.

Q: Thank you. Meto Koloski with the United Macedonian Diaspora. And thank you, Bob, and all the panelists; good to see some familiar faces, particularly Jonathan and Jeff we've been in touch with, but I haven't met in person.

And thank you for the OSCE's work, particularly something Mike mentioned about these fines that countries have to pay after they've taken to the European Court of Human Rights. And for many people in the Macedonian minority in Greece and Bulgaria, they have been perfect vehicles. However, unfortunately, Greece and Bulgaria still do not have equal rights for Macedonian minorities in these countries, and the OSCE has been a great platform for many of these groups to kind of advocate for more rights and greater attention to this.

I wanted to touch on perhaps what Ambassador Peško mentioned regarding the law of languages in Macedonia. What specifically are you working on?

And perhaps Jeff can touch on the role of ethnic parties and why in the Balkans and in Macedonia we probably still have ethnic parties as opposed to political parties on ideology. In most recent elections we did see this crossover of minorities voting for different political parties, but maybe you could touch more specifically on that. And perhaps the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, since the attention or the person responsible for this is somebody from the ethnic Albanian bloc, and Macedonia hasn't ratified the Framework Convention on Minority and Regional Languages. So perhaps you could touch on that and if any efforts your office is working on to meet some of these.

HAND: Another question?

Down in front.

Q: Thank you. My name is Martina Hrvolova. I'm a program manager at the Center for International Private Enterprise.

I, first of all, would like to echo what Ambassador Matković had to say at the beginning about the role of the Helsinki Commission in increasing the awareness of the importance of the region in the United States.

Second of all, the question I have for the honorable speakers today, Bob, is whether you gentlemen believe that a violent conflict in the Balkans is still a real possibility. And if the answer is yes, what is the role of OSCE in mitigating such a risk? Thank you.

HAND: OK, thank you.

Let me start with Ambassador Peško and Jeff for the Macedonia-specific question that was – that was asked by Meto.

PEŠKO: Yeah, can I start with this question first?

HAND: Sure, if you want to.

PEŠKO: OK, all right.

You know, I'm a director of the Conflict Prevention Centre, so our raison d'être is really to try to identify indicators for potential conflicts and try to find tools how to respond early enough to those conflicts. And to – let me just remind the case of Macedonia – or FYROM, as we call it in the OSCE context – I mean, that was a textbook example where the OSCE could be useful to address potentially escalatory situation early enough through the engagement with the local actors, be at that time the government parties and the opposition parties.

I mentioned, you know, our contribution to the elections, the preparation of the early elections, then working together on the implementation of the recommendations, working also to get the creation of this prosecutor office, then engaging with the chairmanship directly, who

coordinated with the European Commission and the U.S. representative in addressing the differences between the government and the opposition. And we have been monitoring, observing constantly the situation in the parliament, in a way creating conducive environment for the parties to engage. And when there was an escalation in the parliament, we immediately responded by dispatching the special representative of the chair. The secretary-general went there as well, trying to really engage the parties into the dialogue and finding way forward, which then led to the elections.

And the results of the elections were accepted by all. That's the most important thing. So perhaps there have been some deficiencies in that process. But on the other hand, ODIHR noted that the elections were democratic, were fair, and reflected the democratic will of the population. So this gave a strong basis for further steps, creation of the coalition government.

And also here the issue of the language law has been mentioned. I understand that currently the law is going to be adopted, and then it will go to the Venice Commission for their review. And I know that the Skopje government is working very closely with the High Commissioner on the National Minorities in addressing potential issues with that law. What's important from our perspective is that the government clearly stated that they would like to really – to find a way how to reunite the country across the ethnic divisions, so that – building a strong civic society. And here, this law should be part of that vision, I think. So if you ask me, if we can see escalation of potential conflict in Balkans, I would say yes, we still have some ingredients in that region where we are not still beyond the point of no return to the escalatory of conflict in situations.

However, for instance, the pressure of migration in 2015 on the region and the way the region was able to deal with these pressures – and we remember, there were disputes between Serbia and Croatia, between Macedonia and Serbia – it demonstrates that the institutions are much more stronger, resilient in being able to cope with these pressures on their own, even without the support of international community. So we are on the right way but – in the right track, but we still have some time to achieve sufficient or strong enough institutions to be able to cope with these situations. And we can have conflict situations also in other parts of Europe. Let's be frank. The Balkans is not excluded, you know? It's not like this. We have this situation that's also about the participating states, to what extent they would be ready to engage OSCE in addressing these issues together with this multilateral structure.

HAND: OK, thank you.

Jeff, would you like to give a response?

GOLDSTEIN: Yes, let me try and respond, but I apologize in advance. I'm getting a lot of feedback at this end. And I'm not totally sure that I understood the question, so if my answers are a little bit off base I apologize. I heard a question about the ethnic parties, about the Ohrid Framework Agreement, and all languages. So let me just say a few words on that. I hope I get near the target.

Regarding the role of ethnic parties, since the conflict here in 2001 up until last year, essentially, you had four political parties in this country, two Macedonian and two Albanian. And approximately 90 percent of the population of this country is either Macedonian or Albanian. Essentially, each group picked among the two of their ethnicity. Hardly surprising, I suppose, in this part of the world, when you ask someone about how they identify themselves, they're much more likely to come up with their ethnic group, their nationality, rather than their citizenship. That's changed a little bit here now. We'll have to see how long the phenomena is, but it has now lasted through two electoral cycles. So I think it's an open question about whether we're heading towards maybe some breakdown of this very rigid divide in which you had essentially two parallel but not touching political processes in the country.

On the Ohrid Framework Agreement, of course, a large part of our mandate is to work on helping with implementation of the agreement. I think there has been some progress. I think there is a lot of work to do, particularly on issues such as inclusivity. I think one of the real challenges this country faces is the fact that one of the more important provisions of the Ohrid Agreement was that all children should have the ability to study in their native languages. The way that's been implemented over the last 16 years or so has resulted in the fact that we now have a generation of people who have grown up somewhat self-segregated from each other. And so one of the issues that we're working very hard on is greater inclusivity or integration.

Finally, the law on languages. Very briefly, this is a law that has caused some controversy here. Of course, a very important part of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, is assuring the use of languages of all of the ethnic groups here, with greater or lesser remit depending on the size of the group. The government has promised that once passed by parliament, the law will go to the Venice Commission and they will fix any problems that this commission recognizes with this. So we're expecting that to move ahead very shortly now that the elections are over. And hopefully, again, this will have a positive outcome.

HAND: OK.

Jonathan, would you like to make a comment?

MOORE: Quickly. I'll be very brief on the issue of ethnic parties. To discuss that with reference to Bosnia-Herzegovina would take far more time than anybody living I think has. I am pleased that here in the front row we have the founders of one of the important parties that's tried very hard to have non-ethnic politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Reuf Bajrovic. But I'll leave that issue aside. Most parties in Bosnia, unfortunately, are very ethnic. And in fact, ethnic politics are used to divide the country.

However, to answer Ms. Hrvolova's question, is violent conflict a possibility, yes. Of course, I suppose anywhere, any time – New York yesterday, in that sense. But cross-border conflict I don't think is a threat in the Balkans. It's not the early 1990s Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo. Yes, they have difficulties as bilateral – in their bilateral relationships, but the prospect of a conflict, anything like happened 20 years ago and earlier, I don't see that.

However, internally, because of the growing threat of violent extremism, this is something we have to pay a lot of attention to. And this is exactly why what CIPE is doing to help bring societies and people and entrepreneurs together, what OSCE mission on the ground can do with this – regard to that to bring attention to local communities is so important. The Austrian chairmanship in office this year, under the leadership of Sebastian Kurz, brought in a special representative on CVE, Professor Peter Neumann. And he educated a lot of people on the fact that when you have a terrorist attack, you shouldn't just be wondering what the motives of the terrorists were and what the antecedents were, but what are the consequences. And in this particular case, this is what – our big concern of Bosnia and Herzegovina, one attack in one place in a divided community can really tear the country apart. So keeping the country stitched together and avoiding violent conflict within the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovinian is a big focus for the mission because, exactly, we do fear the possibility of something spinning out of control. Thank you.

HAND: OK, we had a question over here in the middle.

Q: Thank you. Ardita Dunellari with Voice of America.

Recently the deputy head of the European Parliament put the blame on the Kosovo authorities for not pushing ahead with the border issue with Montenegro and blaming the Kosovo authorities that they're holding hostage the issue of visa liberalization. Do you agree with Ms. Lunacek's assessment? And if so, what is OSCE doing, if they can do anything at all, to help the process along as it's not just the political issue but it's holding hostage also economic advancement and a lot of the citizens' rights?

And also, I wanted to pick up on the point that you were making about a different question on holding these communities together and hopefully preventing any conflict in the future. These societies, as much as the international structures and institutions, are trying to bring human rights to these very multiethnic societies. It seems that the issue of self-imposed segregation is happening. We have schools that are operating on one language versus multilingual environment that these countries have. And on the other hand, while you mention that there is an effort to overcome this self-segregation, is there any effort being put into making these countries self-sufficient? Right now these multitudes of schools and institutions that operate among multi languages which are very expensive, very cumbersome, are being supported by the international community. Is there any effort for a future when these countries will be weaned out and need to support this cumbersome system that's been created? Thank you.

HAND: OK.

And then we had one question over here.

Q: Hi, I'm Marlina Casey. I'm a Foreign Service officer with the State Department heading out to Sarajevo with some of my colleagues here.

Thank you so much for reviewing the domestic issues that are occurring in each country and the programmatic focus for each domestic issue, and in some case cross-border issues.

Ambassador Peško, you raised regional challenges, cross-border challenges, transnational organized crime, foreign fighters, migration, and so on. And so I'm wondering if the OSCE has a regional programmatic approach to these regional challenges, particularly because, you know, you mentioned a broad integration and broad regional agenda. So I'm wondering if the way we're addressing it or the OSCE addresses programmatically matches those cross-border challenges. Thank you.

GOLDSTEIN: Maybe I can give a quick answer to the first question, regarding holding the community together. You know, this country or this region does have a history of intercommunal violence. But I have to say that I have been actually pleasantly surprised here by the maturity of the population.

So, in 2015, it was still not completely clear what happened, but a firefight in the town of Kumanovo between a group of armed ethnic Albanians, many of them from Kosovo, and the police, there was some belief that this was an effort to somehow spark interethnic conflict. There was some pretty significant, harsh rhetoric on ethnic lines over the course of the crisis here in the winter. And, you know, it became very apparent that if it was intended to try and goad the population into intercommunal violence, it was failing.

I think a lot of people in this part of the world have seen what intercommunal violence looks like and don't want any part of it anymore. And I think a lot of what we're doing is trying to build that cohesion together. There are certainly problems here. There are certainly potential flashpoints. But I don't think, at the same time, that we should underestimate the degree to which people here want to get on with their lives and move beyond intercommunal conflict.

On the question about self-segregation and trying to make this more sustainable, again, I can only speak for this country, but I am not aware of large amounts of money going into things like education in this country. In fact, up until recently, this country has had very little foreign debt. It's not a huge aid recipient. Now, again, I'm only speaking about the country where I am right now, but I'm not quite sure I agree with the premise of the question, that somehow the international community is supporting these multiethnic institutions that the countries couldn't afford on their own. I'm not sure that's the case here.

HAND: OK. Thank you, Jeff.

Jonathan, would you –

MOORE: Yeah. Quickly again, if I may, I would be a little stronger than Jeff. The international community is not supporting in that sense. Certainly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, divided education, it is quite the contrary: We're trying to put the schools together. You made exactly the point. They're very expensive when you have multiple schools, different textbooks and staff.

At the same time, the right to education in your language is something that exists in a lot of EU member states where there are ethnic populations. From the British ambassador in

Sarajevo I learned about the example of Northern Ireland, where there are very separate protestant schools and Catholic schools, where the overall focus is on quality, education. You can't force all the kids together and ignore their right for instruction in their language. But at the same time, certainly we're not spending energy to divide them in education. The high school students in Jajce are a wonderful example of that.

Responding to the question from the Foreign Service colleague about regional efforts and cross-border challenges, honestly – maybe I'll be more blunt than Marcel could be – there is a broad region. We talk about the Western Balkans. Croatia does not consider itself to be part of the Western Balkans but pays a lot of attention to the region. It's a good beacon because it completed the accession process, joining both NATO and EU. And yet, we have no OSCE Mission in Croatia anymore, so regional cooperation with Croatia is not exactly a role for the mission to take on.

At the same time, because of good professional contacts, I was able to have meetings in Zagreb on a number of occasions and bring some positive attention to what was actually going on in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as opposed to what was being reported in the press in Zagreb, and the opinion of some of the more senior leaders there. So, in comparison, for example, to the team in Serbia, where we have a mission – and Mike and I got together frequently in Belgrade and with his boss, the current head of mission and the previous head of mission, we were able to interact a lot with other countries in the region. Our writ and our ability to be flexible is somewhat constrained within the framework of the national mandates we have. But it does give us a perspective. And of course, we share those ideas with bilateral embassies in capitals.

UYEHARA: I mentioned the fact that, based on the Follow Us initiative of our partnership with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, we are planning to have this regional conference based in Belgrade bringing people together. And so the OSCE participating State delegations have encouraged the missions in the Balkans to work more closely together. And two examples that we cite is the regional housing program, where we work with, I think, it's Bosnia and Herzegovina – right? – and Croatia, Montenegro, and use funds from the European Union as well as PRM to build housing for refugees from the Bosnian conflict in the areas where they've been displaced. And so that's a regional approach to an issue where we work with other missions.

And then there's also one of the other sort of regional initiatives that we like to cite is a cooperative venture to develop this serious organized crime threat assessment, which is an assessment that's required by Interpol and Europol as well. It requires a certain degree of sophistication, and we work with the missions in Montenegro and in Macedonia together in order to get the police and the ministries of interior in these three countries to reach that particular capacity. And so the OSCE missions in areas where there are sort of common objectives do work together. And for instance, when Jeff was describing his mission's new priorities, it seemed to me that there would be areas where we could cooperate as well.

PEŠKO: Yes, on this regional cooperation, I mentioned some of these processes – Berlin process, Berdo/Briani process – so this is ongoing. And we see OSCE's role as complementary role to that. One of the areas where I see room for improvement is regional trade, for instance,

and regional trade and investment, also transport, so the whole connectivity issue. And this is where our Office for Economic and Environmental Cooperation is very much involved.

And we have also Transnational Threats Department in the secretariat who are dealing with the CVE issues, so organizing regional conferences. We had conferences in Tirana, for instance, on tolerance and foreign fighters. We also pursued the creation of the network of the youth representatives in the region. So we have such regional office of the youth representatives now nested in our mission in Tirana. So there are these sort of attempts to do more in that area. But as it was said, we don't have a Western Balkan mission, right? So we have separate missions. And what we do, we are trying to engage heads of missions to really get together and identify areas where it provides an added value.

You know, I always use the example of how we work on borders in the respective countries, in Macedonia, in Serbia, where I think that the fact that the region was able to cope with these migratory flows was also a result of our long-term engagement in strengthening border management capabilities across the region as well.

Another area is the whole security sector, reform and governance. That's also a part where we are trying to establish high-level standards in managing the democratic oversight of the armed forces pursuing the modernization of policing as well. I mean, we are building up here a sort of regional approach. It's not that we have a different approach in Bosnia from that ones in Montenegro or Macedonia. But more can be done. And as I identified, it's mainly in that area of organized crime, tolerance, interfaith cooperation. So those are the areas where we see room for improvements.

On Kosovo, you know, what we have seen recently in Western Balkans was the crisis of parliamentarism. We have not had for some time functioning parliaments in Pristina before the elections. We have seen these functions of parliament in Skopje during this two years' crisis. We've seen still the boycotting of parliament by some parties in Montenegro as well.

And of course, the borders, those are purely bilateral issues. This is not for the OSCE to engage directly in some sort of mediatory role here. But our interests is that the parliaments are working in a democratic way, that there is a participation in that processes. And unfortunately, this border issue has become a hostage of that dysfunctionality on both sides for some time.

At the same time, let me remind you that the OSCE has facilitated series of elections in Kosovo, both Serbian elections, most recently, the presidential elections, so that we created an environment and structures which allowed to conduct these elections in Kosovo in an orderly way, and collect the ballots and basically cover the whole area.

Just recently, we also participated in the support of the parliamentary elections in Kosovo as well. So what I'm saying is that what we are more focused is on the strengthening of functioning democratic institutions, as opposed to dealing with a concrete issue of the borders so that the sides are able to address these issues bilaterally, feeling comfortable and not instrumentalizing this issue in their internal political discourse.

Unfortunately, that's not yet the situation. While this issue of the visa liberalization for the citizens of Kosovo is an issue, but this is something which is on the agenda of the European Union, of course. And from our perspective, we are very much supportive of that, as we believe that there should be equal treatment of all citizens in that region. On the other hand, I can understand the political logic of this requirement. There is a pressure on Kosovo's side and the parliament particularly, and all political parties to take the political responsibility and agree on their borders.

HAND: Thank you.

Let me just ask the final question and then we'll close the briefing. We're a little bit over two hours now already. There's so much to discuss.

But there are two issues that got mentioned very briefly but I would just like to see if we can have a little bit of elaboration upon them, as the issues are important to the Helsinki Commission. One is trafficking in persons. The countries of the Balkans, according to the United States State Department, are all tier-two countries, meaning that they're not meeting the requirements, although they're striving to do so. Two of the countries are on tier-two watch list – Serbia and Montenegro – because there seems to be some negative trends in those countries. Of course, it touches on rule of law issues. The migration issue has come up in terms of trafficking, et cetera. I was just wondering if the three former or current members of the mission could quickly speak about what OSCE activity is in regard to trafficking in persons.

And then along the same lines, another very important interest to the Helsinki Commission is the plight of Roma, Romani communities in the Balkans, and actually throughout Europe. And there was a recent European Roma Rights Center report that talked about statelessness among Roma as an intergenerational problem in the Balkans. If any of you could also just give a brief comment about what might be done specifically on the statelessness issue for Roma, or more generally your engagement with Romani communities in the countries where you had served or are currently serving.

Who would like to go first?

GOLDSTEIN: OK, well, I was actually just this morning addressing a regional workshop on undocumented Roma that we organized together with the Ministry of Labor here. We do a lot of work on two aspects of the situation of Roma here.

One is undocumented. There are still several hundred people in this country, both people who were never documented after the collapse of Yugoslavia and people who came over as part of the wave of refugees from Kosovo. The estimates are somewhere between 900 and 1,500 people without documentation. The conference I was at was basically bringing together responsible officials from several countries in the region to discuss steps moving forward on this. We have commissioned a couple of expert studies this year that have just been delivered to the Ministry of Labor.

The other issue where we're just starting to get involved is the question of Roma street children and what can be done to try and get more of them back into the education system. And again here, we have hired an expert on the issue to draft a paper that's just been provided to our host officials.

On trafficking, we take a multidimensional approach to this. We work on it from the human dimension point of view in a lot of our work with what we actually call school safety groups that work on a lot of issues, everything from the threat of trafficking, to bullying, to extremism with high school students. We also work on it in our work with the police largely in terms of helping them to deal with the trafficking elements that have been part of the migration flow that swamped this country two years ago, and which still continues to trickle through. So we work on both trying to increase public awareness of the issue, and capacity of the authorities working together with civil society to fight against trafficking.

UYEHARA: With regard to the trafficking in persons, what I understand is the OSCE mission two or three years ago phased out its direct support in that area. We did provide a briefing to a delegation – I think it was from Kazakhstan – that was interested in sort of seeing the Serbian example, because I guess the Serbian infrastructure is fairly well-developed, and it was on a study tour, and so then they came by and stopped with the OSCE mission as well to get a briefing about our activities more broadly speaking.

And most recently, the only sort of intersection that I'm aware of where we had addressed an issue that touched on trafficking in persons was the promotion of the principle with the Ministry of Justice on the non-punishment principle for victims of trafficking. It's my impression that that has been established in law, and so then I would assume – this was before my arrival at the mission – that the mission assessed its support provided for trafficking in persons, and concluded that with regard to sort of the structure of civil society organizations, NGOs providing support to the victims, as well as the structure of laws and the capability of the police with regard to enforcement, were all, from our perspective, adequate in that there's not that much that we could do on the subject. We moved on.

And then, with regard to Roma, until last year in fact, we had several multimillion euro extra-budgetary projects directed towards Roma integration. I think it was in an order of 7 million euros over a period of four years or so, one of them funded by the Swedish government, the other funded by the European Union. And this European Union-funded project was initially called the Technical Assistance to Roma Integration and then it was European Support for Roma Integration, and I would say, frankly speaking, partly driven by German concerns about the fact that Roma were habitually flying to Germany, claiming asylum and enjoying the benefits provided asylees and then returning and doing this repeatedly. And they wanted to sort of reduce that activity, and one way to do that was to improve the conditions for Roma in Serbia.

And this multimillion dollar project had several different lines of activity. It included purchasing equipment as incentives for small companies that agree to hire Roma. And in one case, as I understand it, we bought a tanning bed for a beauty salon that had hired some Roma. Providing tutoring assistance, and that we established these mobile teams with various municipalities where the mobile teams brought together a pedagogical assistant, a tutor, a

community health person and a social worker and a local government representative, and we bought vehicles for them so that they could go around to the various Roma communities. That project ended last year, and we had hopes that we would be able to then be selected for a successor, but the European Union sort of contracting procedures essentially disallowed the OSCE mission based on some obscure accounting rules that we're trying to sort of work out with the secretariat now so that we can compete in the future. And so then our activities with regard to the Roma community have been sort of ramped down. We have a unit that still uses core budgetary funds to provide some assistance, but that's pretty selective and not at the scale as before. So, thank you.

MOORE: Well, first of all, I have to take this opportunity here at the Helsinki Commission to praise your co-chair, Congressman Chris Smith, who has really been a leader for decades on the issue of trafficking in persons, or trafficking in human beings, as OSCE calls it. It is part of our mission activities. The mission does not have the lead, and the international community works very closely with bilateral embassies and the EU delegation. It does tie into the rule of law and security sector governance and reform programs that the mission has.

With regard to Roma, the mission has had some outstanding young Romani interns, has a number of Roma employees, has worked, including Dervo Sejdić, well-known to the world as half of the Sejdić/Finci case in the European Court of Human Rights against the Dayton Constitution, which they won and still needs to be resolved.

And we've also been involved directly with EU efforts to provide Roma housing. There are good ways and bad ways of doing that, and I'm very pleased that there's some communities that have done that extremely well, like Kakanj, for example, which is just half an hour or so from Sarajevo.

It's also a clear issue for education. A lot of young Roma are denied the chance to go to school. Even beginning to talk about instruction in their language is a very early topic. It is something where the mission is deeply engaged.

HAND: All right. Thank you. At this point, I'd like to close the briefing. We're 15 minutes over and into our lunch time. I would just say that I, myself, had actually served on what was then a CSCE, now OSCE, mission, way back in 1993. At the same time that the mission to Skopje was founded, so was one to Kosovo, the Sandžak and Vojvodina, in Serbia and Montenegro, which were in a federal Yugoslav state at the time. And I served in Novi Pazar, in the Sandžak, between Bosnia and Kosovo, not necessarily the most pleasant place to be when there's war raging right next door, dealing with paramilitaries, as well as refugees and a whole host of things.

But what impresses me so much about the OSCE is how it's advanced its capabilities in the field. I had a Danish military colleague who had to fly back to Copenhagen and drive back with his own 1980s Fiat because we only had one vehicle that somebody at the Conflict Prevention Centre went out and bought with a credit card and it needed servicing, and it was very much an effort trying to keep things patched together. But yet we got some things done. And now that we have a better infrastructure in the OSCE with its institutionalization, every time I go

to the countries in the region, I'm impressed how many OSCE vehicles are moving around, how visible the OSCE is, and how it is trying to have an impact. I think it's very good and it speaks well of the organization.

And I would also say that my opportunities, which continue, to meet with various Americans who are seconded to the mission, like the panelists we have here with us today, shows the degree of support to which the United States gives to these missions. And I hope that that really continues despite the budgetary problems we may have. I also hope that all of our European countries will also rally around the OSCE flag to be able to get some things done.

Finally, since there's a lot of thanks and praise for the Helsinki Commission, I'd like to thank our front office administrator Jordan Warlick, who's over advocating free media in Vienna right now, for nevertheless getting us the room and a lot of the logistics that made this happen.

I'd like to thank Stacy Hope, our communications director – please raise your hand – who makes sure that we get out on Facebook and other things that I'm still trying to understand myself, what we do, but that gets us greater exposure.

And if the Helsinki Commission is able to do some of the positive things that we were praised for today, it's because of our interns. And we have a merry band of interns with us today who really helped make this happen. Our lead intern in particular, Woody Atwood, I'd like to thank for making this connection with Skopje happen with Jeff. The only thing that Woody could have done to make this better would have been to push me aside and get out of his way so that he could get more things done. And so I want to thank him also for working with me in organizing all of this. It really went well.

And hopefully, we can have more discussion about what the OSCE can do in the Balkans and perhaps in other regions, Central Asia, the Caucasus, where it has a definite role to play in the future, when and if Ambassador Peško returns to Washington at some point, or some other OSCE official.

And until that time, let me wish you all the best. And I hope that you enjoyed the briefing, and keep in touch. Thank you. (Applause.)

[Whereupon, at 12:16 p.m., the briefing ended.]