

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

“U.S. Priorities for Engagement at the OSCE”

Committee Members Present:

**Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS), Co-Chairman;
Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), Ranking Member;
Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member;
Senator John Boozman (R-AR);
Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI);
Representative Emanuel Cleaver, II (D-MO);
Representative Marc Veasey (D-TX);
Representative Richard Hudson (R-NC);
Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)**

Committee Staff Present:

**Rebecca Neff, State Department Senior Advisor, Commission for Security and
Cooperation in Europe**

Witness:

**Ambassador Philip T. Reeker, Senior Bureau Official, U.S. Department of
State**

**The Hearing Was Held From 10:04 a.m. To 11:34 a.m. via Videoconference,
Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), Ranking Member, Commission for Security and
Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

Date: Tuesday, December 8, 2020

CARDIN: (In progress) I participated, Senator Wicker participated, I think Senator Hudson also participated in some of the side meetings that we've had during this period of time within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. And we had a meeting virtually to reaffirm our commitment to the OSCE moving forward. So, it was a commitment by parliamentarians from the OSCE states that we recognized we needed to do more.

Last month we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Charter of Paris. We had a Parliamentary Assembly gathering to help celebrate the Charter. It was the fall of the iron curtain that brought that about. And one of the great opportunities that I've had in my lifetime was to be in Berlin and actually take home a piece of the wall, and to see the fall of the iron curtain. I was in East and West Berlin when there was a wall separating, going through Checkpoint Charlie. I saw the wall come down. And I've been to the unified Germany and unified Berlin. And so what developments have we seen over this period of time?

The Treaty of Paris very clearly pointed out that we're ushering in a new era of peace and unity, and the states agreed that democracy was the only system of government of nations, they confirmed human rights and fundamental freedoms were the birthright of all human beings, and free and fair elections were the bedrock of democracy. That was the Charter of Paris 30 years ago. We thought we had achieved the objectives that we set out in 1975 when we agreed to the Helsinki Final Accords. And you know, of course, the Soviet Union was a party to the Accords at that time.

Well, in the decades that have followed, reality set in. And we recognize that the challenges to democracy and human rights, and free and fair elections still exist in the OSCE region, unfortunately. We need to reevaluate the structure of the OSCE. And we welcome your thoughts as to how we can be more effective here in the United States and within the structure of the OSCE. We know there are challenges on transparency and on the involvement of civil societies.

But the real problem within the OSCE today is participating States not complying with their commitments. We see that obviously with Russia's engagement in Ukraine. We see that in what happened in Belarus. We see that in so many countries. We see that in Hungary when they tried to take over the press. And we see these violations occurring and we know that we must redouble our efforts.

I want to thank you for your help, Mr. Ambassador, with the observation team that came here during our past elections. I had a chance to speak to the parliamentarians and thank them for their participation. And free and fair elections is one of the key responsibilities of a democratic state and election observation is one of the key commitments we make within the OSCE. And I think those who observed the U.S. elections saw that we had very robust participation. It was a very active campaign. And, yes, every state, including the United States, can do better in its commitments under the Helsinki Final Act.

One of the great things about the Final Act is that we have the responsibility and right to challenge what's happening in other member states, and also any state has the right to challenge

what we're doing here in the United States. And it's through that type of mechanism that we've been able to make the type of advancements we have over the years. We look forward to your testimony regarding the OSCE going forward, examining our priorities, and how we can improve.

And, Mr. Ambassador, before you speak, I want to give Senator Wicker and the other members, and Joe Wilson the ranking member of the House side, and also Mr. Hudson who's here, an opportunity to welcome you and make some opening remarks.

Senator Wicker.

WICKER: Well, thank you very much, Senator Cardin, my dear friend and colleague. And, yes, we are delighted that the European Union has taken a great step in the right direction with the Global Magnitsky Act. And I want to thank Ambassador Reeker for being with us today. And I see numerous colleagues on the screen.

Thank you for your leadership, Mr. Ambassador, of the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, and the cooperative spirit your bureau has demonstrated with the commission. Hearing directly from an administration official is very important to us. And I do appreciate my friend Senator Cardin mentioning the 30th anniversary of the Charter of Paris. This is a good opportunity for us to stop and assess how the principles of peace, unity and democracy are holding up today, three decades after they were agreed to by participating states.

As we examine U.S. priorities for engagement in the OSCE, I want to emphasize the importance of looking to the future. Moving forward, the organization should focus its activities where it can have the greatest impact, where it can prevent conflicts or democratic backsliding, and where there's real opportunity and political will to achieve reform. The United States should direct the organization's work to U.S. priorities – such as instability in the Western Balkans and reforms in Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ambassador, the Western Balkans are in your portfolio today, and your previous assignments have made you an expert in the region. I, too, have a deep interest in the Western Balkans, as has this Commission for many years. The United States and our allies have invested heavily in building peace, stability, and democracy in all Balkan countries, including through the OSCE and its strong leader presence. Although some of these countries have made progress, others lag behind.

In July of 2018, I led a nine-member congressional delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, where we emphasized the need to focus more on the individual rather than collective human rights, and to make ethnicity a less significant and divisive factor in government and society. Having just commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Dayton Agreement, which ended the Bosnia conflict, I would appreciate hearing your thoughts on the prospects for more genuine progress in the country. How can we further engage the OSCE to strengthen the progress – the process of democratic reforms and to fight against corruption? And also, can you tell us the prospects for regional stability?

Looking further east, let me mention that Uzbekistan is another country of great interest to the commission, and also to my home state of Mississippi. Uzbekistan partners with the Mississippi National Guard and collaborates with our state research institutions, especially in agricultural economics. Uzbekistan has pursued an ambitious reform agenda under the leadership of President Mirziyoyev.

Positive steps include releasing political and religious prisoners, registering more religious organizations, maintaining the ban on police raids against religious communities, allowing access to previously banned websites, reversing currency restrictions, and putting in place mechanisms to make government more responsive and accountable. It is one of the few participating states that asked the OSCE for more assistance, including requesting a joint review of its draft religion law by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission.

Secretary of State Michael Pompeo announced just yesterday that he had removed Uzbekistan from the special watch list for countries that have committed severe religious freedom violations. This is a very positive sign. I look forward to signs of continued progress, including working with ODIHR and the Venice Commission, to incorporate their recommendations more fully into the draft religion law so that it complies with Uzbekistan's OSCE commitments and international obligations.

Uzbekistan's future support for the development of civil society, independent media, the judicial system, and a truly multiparty electoral system will also be important markers of reform. But I am delighted at this week's development, and they're worth a mention. Yet, despite the OSCE's expertise and examples of positive cooperation, the OSCE continues to have only a small presence on the ground. I'd like to hear your views, Mr. Ambassador, on what more can be done by OSCE and by our own country to advance Uzbekistan's progress. In particular, will the United States use its resources and influence within the OSCE to increase activities substantially in Uzbekistan?

The United States supports the OSCE for one paramount reason: it is an effective tool to advance American interests. We can be sure that all decisions taken at the OSCE reflect U.S. views because all decisions require consensus. It is worth noting that the cost of U.S. participation is much less than some other organizations. And I would argue the benefits are greater. The OSCE embodies the core values we share with our European partners and provides a platform for working together to address crises in the OSCE region, inhabited by 1.2 billion people.

So, Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much. Thank you, Senator Cardin, for your leadership. And I look forward to the testimony.

CARDIN: Thank you, Senator Wicker.

Congressman Wilson.

WILSON: Thank you very much. And, ladies and gentlemen, it's an honor to be with my colleagues. I'm grateful to be with you. And welcome Ambassador Philip Reeker to the Helsinki Commission. I have appreciated your dedicated service at the State Department during these challenging times in European affairs. I was only recently joined the Helsinki Commission in this Congress, but I've been active on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and also Armed Services Committee and a number of different country caucuses. I've also participated in NATO and now the OSCE Parliamentary Assemblies. My colleagues and I appreciate the ability to interact not only with our European counterparts, but with U.S. diplomats who do a tremendous job of staffing U.S. embassies and missions across the OSCE region.

Thus far, I would like to make two observations about the OSCE. First, I note its membership. It was the first regional institution to include former communist countries like Bulgaria, where I was an election observer in 1990, and Slovakia, where I had the opportunity to lecture on democracy in 1993. And to help them restore and build democratic institutions, and eventually to become the NATO and EU members they are today. Had the OSCE not existed, these and several of our other allies might not have had the sense of security and support to transform themselves into democratic allies with the extraordinary opportunities of success for their citizens.

There are countries that have not made it as far, in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and the Caucasus. Continuing our engagement with them within OSCE can only help them along. While it is important to have a place where the like-minded can talk about the threats and challenges of Russia, we also need a place where we can engage Russia together on a common front, and the OSCE is ideal for that.

Second, I'll mention the OSCE's broad focus. While some issues are outside the purview of the OSCE, there's been wide enough interest that some contributions to pressing issues is possible – whether it is combatting human trafficking, tackling corruption, countering violent extremism, or defending freedom of the media. These initiatives within the OSCE cannot replace efforts done elsewhere, including in our own bilateral relations, but they can complement these efforts with additional resources and expertise.

I look forward to your comments on these issues, as well as some of the items high on our agenda right now. That would certainly include the struggle for the people of Belarus to determine their own future and the crackdown of the Lukashenko regime in response. I also have great concern about Russian aggression in Ukraine, with 13,000 killed, and in its other neighbors, including Moldova and Georgia, and the malign influence of Moscow, but increasingly on Beijing and vulnerable regions of Europe.

Again, Mr. Ambassador, thank you for being here and I look forward to your testimony. I yield back.

CARDIN: Thank you, Congressman Wilson. We're also joined by other members of the Commission – Congressman Cleaver, Congressman Veasey, Congressman Hudson, who's also an officer – one of the chairs of our committees within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly – and Senator Boozman.

With that, I'm going to turn it over to the ambassador. And let me just introduce Ambassador Reeker. I think we all know him rather well. He's currently the acting assistant secretary at the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. He has a broad background within diplomacy at the State Department, having taken on numerous positions including the civilian deputy and policy advisor to the commander of the U.S. European Command. He also served as the United States Consul General in Milan, Italy. And he's had service in Iraq and Hungary. He's done a lot. And we appreciate his commitment to the OSCE. So, Ambassador Reeker, we are pleased to hear from you.

REEKER: Senator Cardin, thanks so much. Senator Wicker, Congressman Wilson, other members of the committee, it really is a great pleasure for me to join you today. And I just want to start out by thanking all of you for your dedication to the Helsinki Commission, to the OSCE and its related entities and institutions. It's such a crucial platform and part of our transatlantic engagement.

I know it took some time to arrange this hearing. When I was called back from U.S. European Command to be the acting assistant secretary, I was told would be six to nine months – (laughs) – one of the first things I wanted to do was make sure we were following up on that testimony I did back in 2013 when I was deputy assistant secretary and engage with the committee particularly on Western Balkans and other issues. It's taken us a little longer. After 20-some months, I'm still here in this chair. We've been through a lot. But your support is a crucial part of that. And I say to our European partners as well as our colleagues across the United States, we have so much going for us in the transatlantic relationship. And OSCE exemplifies that.

I think it's great to have this clear message to friends and, frankly, to foes alike of the unwavering and bipartisan support and commitment that the United States has from the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe.. And I really want to applaud the principled and creative contributions of the commissioners, and the efforts of the Parliamentary Assembly, which strengthen the security dimension, in particular. Senator Cardin noted, 1989 was not all that long ago. I recall being in Berlin at the time as a student when the wall came down and what that meant. It really helped define what has ended up being my career in the Foreign Service, trying to bring together east and west.

I think my predecessors would all say the same, that the OSCE plays a unique role in the foreign relations of the United States with Europe, but also with Canada. And it is the one organization that brings in Central Asia as well. This is an organization where the United States speaks directly with our democratic friends and allies, as well as with countries like Russia that demonstrably do not share our values. We deliver those messages undiluted and underscore the comprehensive concept of security, and the importance of implementing the commitments to the Helsinki principles, in all three dimensions – political/military, economic/environmental, and the human dimension.

As noted, we just concluded last week the 27th Ministerial Council meeting of the OSCE. It was planned to be held in Tirana. And indeed, Prime Minister Rama and the Albanian

chairmanship deserve great credit for steering and organizing the Ministerial Council meeting, and a whole year of extraordinary challenges during this time of the COVID pandemic. They ensured that key functions continued, including the vital work of the field missions.

They dealt very professionally, all year long with a number of unprecedented challenges, including, for instance, when the OSCE special monitoring mission in Ukraine was falsely accused of spreading the very pandemic that we're trying to manage, or when, as noted, Belarus launched a brutal crackdown after their fraudulent election. Or, indeed, most recently when war broke out again in the Caucasus.

Prime Minister Edi Rama rightly chose to hold the meeting virtually. Deputy Secretary of State Biegun provided the U.S. statement at that meeting. There were a lot of programs on the margins of the meeting that I and several of my team participated in. We called out Moscow's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and pushed Russia to implement the Minsk commitments and end its occupation of Crimea. We raised concerns over Russia's recent efforts to clamp down on freedom of the press, and freedom of expression. We called on the Belarusian authorities to honor its human rights obligations and to implement the recommendations of the Moscow Mechanism report.

All of these issues fall within the OSCE bailiwick, and are vitally important in terms of pointing out where countries have signed up to these very principles which, in some cases, they're violating. We reaffirmed, the U.S. position for Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the Minsk Group process. Our co-chair in the Minsk Group progress, Andrew Schofer, is again traveling – one of the few travelers that I've authorized from the European bureau – to meet in Geneva, with his focus on Georgia, but then to go to both Yerevan and Baku to discuss Nagorno-Karabakh.

We've called upon participating states to respect the rule of law and fulfill broadly their obligations under international law. I do think it's important to remember how difficult it can be to reach consensus in an organization of 57 participating states. But nevertheless, we've made substantial progress on some key issues at the ministerial meeting in terms of combatting transnational organized crime, combatting corruption through digitalization and increased transparency, preventing and eradicating torture, as well as a statement on Moldova.

Most significantly, you'll all be aware that at this ministerial we critically reached consensus on new leadership for OSCE. And we were pleased to see the slate agreed by consensus, and that the OSCE's new Secretary-General is Helga Schmid, whom I know well from her role as secretary-general at the European Union's external action service. She's been a successful partner of a number of successive U.S. administrations. She'll be a dynamic leader. And the other key leadership positions were also filled.

We do hope in the coming year that Russia will collaborate with us more constructively on an updated Vienna document. As you said, it's important to take a look at these documents and, in the case of the Vienna document, seek to rebuild military transparency in Europe. We think that the OSCE is the right forum for nations to also look at impacts of the pandemic, not

only what we're dealing with now, but as we go forward, and share best practices. We've got to press governments to uphold their human dimension commitments.

And I know that Ambassador Jim Gilmore, who is an excellent representative of the United States at the OSCE, has been working on a whole range of the human dimension issues. I know he, like I, was disappointed that the 57 failed to reach consensus on a decision to addressing trafficking in persons in situations of emergency. But, we did get the discussion out there, and that's why the platform remains so important even when we cannot reach consensus on all of the issues.

Just to touch on priorities for the OSCE going forward, I think we need to continue underscoring the Helsinki Final Act principles. When I sat in the chair at last year's ministerial I underscored that there is no need to change those principles. The Helsinki Final Act outlines very clearly a set of principles. What we need to do is push all members to live up to their commitments and those principles. And the work that they do in Vienna and in the field in all dimensions of security is so important, as it was 45 years ago when the Helsinki Final Act was adopted.

We need to focus on achieving lasting security and prosperity in the OSCE region. And that depends on upholding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, and respect for human rights of all. We've made great progress, if you think back to 75 years ago and the end of World War II, in what we've done in the transatlantic space and the OSCE area. But there's always more work to be done. We need to continue to focus on Russia's ongoing aggression in Ukraine, as was already mentioned, and their purported annexation of Crimea, which we will never recognize.

Since 2014, that conflict has killed more than 13,000 Ukrainian citizens and driven more than a million from their homes. Although it is not featured on the front pages, we can not forget about it. At the OSCE, we certainly do not. And we continue to push the issue strongly and deliver statements on the subject of Russia's aggression and violation of Ukraine's sovereignty in every single meeting of the Permanent Council.

We do want the OSCE to increase engagement in the ongoing crisis and violent crackdown in Belarus. We were one of the invoking states of the Moscow Mechanism, which culminated in the November 5th release of a detailed and really damning report on the Belarusian authorities' violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms of their citizens before, during, and after the fraudulent August 9th presidential election. We stand with the Belarusian people in their determination to be free. What they seek is a government that simply delivers for them, as anyone should expect and is clearly enshrined in the Helsinki principles.

We'll push back against the malign influence of the People's Republic of China and the Communist Party of China across the OSCE region. In Western Europe, we're working with our European partners and the EU on a dialogue to discuss how to deal with some of the challenges and opportunities of strategic competition with China. But their increasingly aggressive

economic, military, and political actions and policies – including throughout Central Asia – are part of our focus as well.

And the OSCE can help us really identify challenges posed by the coronavirus. We can talk about that more, but it's certainly a subject I think we should continue to follow up between the bureau, the department, and the commission as we move forward into a new stage, a new period of the pandemic. Challenges, of course, to the human dimension are growing. I don't need to spotlight for you increasing restrictions on the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms both, frankly, online and offline.

We're pressing strongly for the release of political prisoners and detainees in the region. The number, sadly, is increasing. Anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, anti-Roma racism, other forms of hatred also continue to rise across the OSCE region. And we need to pay attention to that and stand by our values. And of course, we'll continue to condemn and combat all manifestations of intolerance and support the efforts of ODIHR and other OSCE institutions.

I want to stress – and I know I can count on your support – that it is essential that the Human Dimension Implementation meeting, which was cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic, take place again next year in 2021. There will be those who try to say, we don't need this human dimension element. We don't need the NGOs there. We cannot let that pass. We will stand with you to push for it – whether it is in person, as we certainly hope, or some sort of virtual process.

Let me try to wrap up here and get to some of your specific topics and questions. We will keep the protracted conflicts in Europe – whether it's Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh – high on the OSCE agenda. I talk to Ambassador Gilmore regularly about these. And he raises them all. Just because these things don't make our headlines here, or even the headlines closer to the conflicts in Europe, we cannot let them slide off our list of important topics and focus.

Cessation of fighting – whether it's Nagorno-Karabakh or other places – is only the first step. Durable solutions are the goals of diplomats. We've certainly seen that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where 25 years after an end to violence of a horrible war there is more work to be done there. But we can encourage the people and leaders in those areas to take the important steps they need to take.

I want to mention, too, a focus on hybrid threats. Last week not only did we have the OSCE ministerial, but we also had the NATO ministerial. I joined Secretary Pompeo for his virtual engagement there. I certainly know from my time at European Command, we have to focus in terms of threats to our security on a whole new range of issues – hybrid threats, cyber issues. I know I don't need to tell you this; it's not the era where we wait for massive land forces to move through the Fulda Gap. The threats to us are much more sophisticated and different.

And we at the State Department work closely with our military colleagues but using also platforms like OSCE to address some of these new threats, and call out malign activity, and provide a venue to discuss building resilience and countering and deterring those threats. We

really want OSCE to advance efforts on border security, counterterrorism, and trafficking – which we’ve already mentioned. And we’ll continue to highlighting that.

Finally, let me underscore that we want to see OSCE strengthen military security and transparency in the OSCE region. And to this extent, I think you all may be aware that the United States will assume the chairmanship of the Forum for Security Cooperation beginning January 4th, 2021. This is a key opportunity to project geostrategic leadership and advance political-military priorities. Because of the rotational nature of that chairmanship and the 57 member states in OSCE, we get this opportunity once every 18 years. And we want to use it.

I know Ambassador Gilmore and his team are poised to do that, to advance a discussion of the Vienna document and how to modernize it, which will be an important step for conventional arms control, countering Russian propaganda about NATO’s enhanced forward presence, which is defensive in nature. Zero in on the hybrid threats I mentioned, promote women, peace, and security. That’s an important agenda that was very much on our radar at European Command, I would mention. And highlight challenges with things like MANPEDs, man-portable air defense systems.

And then address security issues affecting Central Asia. And that includes Uzbekistan. I’m very happy to hear about the success of the state partnership program with Mississippi and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan will now have a representative as the high commissioner for national minorities. So Central Asia has a voice in the leadership of the OSCE. And we need to be increasingly aware of that. One of the things I want to make sure we do moving forward is coordinate closely with my colleagues in the South Central Asia Bureau, which has responsibility for the five Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, so that we don’t allow our bureaucratic dividing lines to inhibit our engagement on these subjects.

So with that, Commissioners, let me wrap up the testimony, which I’m afraid went on a little bit too long. But, I’m happy to focus on any specific questions you have and to follow up in written form or with phone calls, and as much engagement as we can going forward. Thank you, again.

CARDIN: Well, Mr. Ambassador, thank you for that very comprehensive testimony laying out our goals as we look forward. I thought you covered so many of the areas, including priorities that are important for us to push – the human dimension follow up meeting, et cetera. So, thank you for that comprehensive report.

I want to acknowledge, we’re also joined by Representative Shelia Jackson Lee, a member of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Representative Steve Cohen, who is a Commission member. We have a large attendance of Commissioners present. I also want to thank Chairman Hastings for arranging for this meeting to take place. And I’m pleased to step in for him in order to keep this meeting on schedule.

And lastly, let me say, Mr. Ambassador, we agree with your assessment of Ambassador Gilmore. He has been an incredible leader in Vienna. He’s kept us engaged. He reaches out to us regularly. He is an attendee at many of our Parliamentary Assembly meetings. He has done, I

think, a real service to this country in dealing with the bureaucracies in Vienna, which is no easy task. So I really wanted to share our appreciation for what Ambassador Gilmore has done during his service at the U.S. Mission to the OSCE.

I've been asked to recognize Rebecca Neff to talk about the logistical issues. Rebecca what do we need to do?

NEFF: Hi, everyone. I'm sorry to jump in midstream. The hearing is proceeding so successfully. I wanted to make sure to let everyone know that the hearing is being conducted under the compliance with House Resolution 965, which provides for official remote proceedings during the COVID pandemic. And that this hearing is convened remotely in order to protect the health and ensure the safety of the witness, members, staff, and the public. And I wanted to let you know that the hearing, as we speak right now, is being broadcast live both on our website and on our YouTube channel.

I would ask that members and our witness keep their cameras on at all times during the hearing, since it's being recorded. If you need to step away for any reason, please make sure to leave your camera on. And if there are any technical difficulties, the chair may need to take a recess to deal with those at any time. And with that, I thank you and I yield back to the chair.

CARDIN: Rebecca, thank you very much for those comments.

First, I'm going to recognize Senator Wicker for any questions he might have.

WICKER: Well, thank you very much, Senator Cardin. And thank you for your generous words about Ambassador Gilmore. And I appreciate Ambassador Reeker mentioning his participation several times during his remarks.

We have a situation where normally Ambassador Gilmore would be expected to resign on January 20th because of the inauguration of the new president. A number of us – this is for general information, not for you to comment about – will be asking that Ambassador Gilmore be allowed to stay on for the entire four months when the United States assumes the Chairmanship of the Forum for Security Cooperation starting in January. And I've had conversations across the aisle. This is a genuine bipartisan request. And I hope that we can make this to the administration.

Mr. Ambassador, would you elaborate a little more about the importance of this once every few years opportunity to have the Chairmanship?

REEKER: Thanks, Senator. Let me just take a moment to thank Rebecca Neff as well. She's one of our own, a senior Foreign Service officer, we're very proud that we could send her up to work with the commission. And I'll note, because I promised I would when I was recently in Paris with Secretary Pompeo that I had a chance to see Mark Toner, who is Rebecca's predecessor. He sends his regards to all the members of the commission and the team. He's doing well out there in Paris, even with lockdown.

I think it's great that you mentioned, Senator, the importance of this opportunity we have, as I said, once every 18 years to chair the the Forum on Security and Cooperation. And I know that our team out there under the excellent leadership of Ambassador Gilmore, is hard at work. I think it gives us a real opportunity to focus on the Vienna document, and some of these other things that need to change. Three to four months can be a long time and a lot can be done utilizing the OSCE's platform.

And I'd love to follow up with a more detailed description of things we have in mind, what's on the agenda during our chairmanship, but really appreciate the focus that you bring to it, and all of you in a bipartisan nature. Because, again, this is a platform that we, at the State Department, see as extremely useful to our broader transatlantic security agenda, completely backed by all of the fundamental principles that OSCE lives by. And so I look forward to keeping in close touch on that as we get ready to start that chairmanship on the 4th of January.

WICKER: Thank you very much. And then let me ask you to comment on another topic that is of concern to me, with regard to government corruption throughout the OSCE region. Talk to us very plainly, Mr. Ambassador. I get the impression, frankly, that there's a lot of backsliding and that there's quite a lot of room for concern among governments that maybe we were a little more optimistic about three decades ago when the wall fell. So if you could help us, enlighten us on the status of corruption in the OSCE region.

REEKER: Senator, it is an important subject that is very much the focus of so much of our work. Indeed, it is something we see, particularly as we have new channels. Some of these hybrid threats tie right into that, in terms of cyber and other forms of corruption. And it has undermined societies. That's why I tried to stress how we need to use the OSCE during and in the aftermath of this pandemic. Because there's great concern about how the pandemic has provided opportunities for corruption as well.

We were pleased to see at the ministerial adoption by consensus of decisions that focus on combatting corruption through digitalization and increased transparency. So we have used the platform to raise awareness, to focus on the problem. And that's the first step. Now we need to get all member states to live by that. And, as I think you and I, all of us know there will be those who are more reluctant to shine that light. But it's something we will continue to focus on, strategic corruption and elite capture in Europe are challenges.

Just to put it in a nutshell, we all know and we've seen – I've certainly seen in almost 30 years of service – that countries with strong democratic institutions and processes that adhere to the rule of law and protect individual freedoms, are the critical foundation for advancing not only their own security, stability, and prosperity but advancing U.S. national security and foreign policy goals throughout the region. And so corruption that erodes that stability is something we have to be very aware of. It facilitates Russian and Chinese malign influence. And, transnational criminal organizations thrive on this kind of strategic corruption, and weaponization of corrupt individuals and institutions for strategic national purposes.. Certainly, we look forward to your continued interest in keeping in close contact on this topic.

WICKER: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

CARDIN: Thank you, Senator.

Congressman Wilson.

WILSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, want to join with everyone to congratulate Ambassador Jim Gilmore for his service. And, Ambassador Reeker, thank you. What a great team you all make.

I also was very pleased to see the OSCE had a delegation to observe our elections last month. I know how important election observation can be. I've been very fortunate to host former Slovak Ambassador to the United States Peter Burian to observe our presidential primary. It was really uplifting. Congressman Clay will be impressed that at half the precincts we met people who had Slovak heritage. So, it was so exciting for them to meet the Ambassador from Slovakia. I've also had the opportunity to have correspondents from Der Spiegel come and visit precincts of voters with German heritage but who have had 200 years of assimilation into American life. It was very uplifting for them.

But the bottom line is I was disappointed to find out that there are 18 U.S. states that bar foreign election observers. Is there any way that I or my colleagues could work with the State Department to change that policy, because that's really just uplifting and enlightening for observers to see the U.S. electoral process.

REEKER: Thanks, Congressman. Slovakia, of course, was the previous OSCE chairman in office last year and continued to be part of the troika facilitating the work this year. And it does remind us that our heritage here in the U.S. often has so many ties to the OSCE area. We certainly stand by the commitment that we and every member state makes to the OSCE to allow international election observers. And we really value those observer missions. Certainly, in our own country, as you mentioned, and throughout the OSCE area.

This year, as we have in the past, Ambassador Gilmore's team in Vienna, working with the European Bureau, coordinated with the National Association of State Election Directors and the National Association of Secretaries of State to educate their members about the OSCE's role and their record of what we call the "gold standard" of observation methodology and procedures.

Obviously, we respect various states' individual election laws and procedures but join you in hoping that we can strengthen the outreach that we do here at home and coordination in future years to really help provide as much information as possible and clarity about the OSCE's valuable role. So I look forward to keeping in touch on that, Congressman.

WILSON: Look forward to working with you. And my final question: It's been so inspiring to see the people of Belarus stand up for freedom and democracy. What we can do to back up the people of Belarus?

REEKER: Thanks for asking about Belarus. It's been an important part of our work this year. We need to show them solidarity. We need to use every platform we have. You may

know, Congressman, we've had a strategic initiative within the European Bureau and the Department of State to try to engage Belarus. And in fact, I accompanied Secretary Pompeo on a half-day visit there in early February.

Our message was simply that we're not trying to make them choose between Russia and the West, but simply to tell them they have options and that we would like to see a better relationship if they could address some of the concerns we have. We thought there was some real progress there. We even facilitated some opportunities for them to purchase energy supplies from the United States. But as we all saw in August, the regime carried out fatally flawed elections, where even our Russian colleagues had to admit the results were completely implausible.

And the voice of the people of Belarus, who peacefully have stood up day after day since then – enduring some terrible repression by the heavy hand of Lukashenko. We have joined with our European partners to focus on sanctions and other activities to increase the pressure. We will continue to focus on that until the regime makes changes and provides to the Belarusian people the government they deserve, that delivers for them. We believe it's very important to see our nominee for ambassador, a colleague of ours, Julie Fisher, be confirmed so that we can be able to engage and have a focus for our embassy in Minsk to be able to stand up and show our support for the people. We'll be sure to keep in close touch with the Commission on those issues as well.

WILSON: Thank you very much. And I yield back.

CARDIN: Next will be Senator Boozman.

If he's not there, Representative Cleaver.

CLEAVER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I appreciate being here. I did have a chance to speak with Chairman Hastings earlier this week and guaranteed him that we would all be here today.

Mr. Ambassador, thank you for being here. I think the Belarus issue is significant and I'm glad someone has already raised that issue with you. I'm on the Financial Services Committee and we did something in our committee that I think in the long run is going to pay some great dividends. We had legislation that created a diversity and women's bureau in all 12 of the financial service agencies related to the government, such as the FDIC, OCC, and so forth. And it has worked quite well. This was when Barney Frank was in Congress, although I think Maxine Waters led that effort. I think if you talk to people at the Federal Reserve, for example, they will say that it was one of the best things that they've done.

And I'm wondering if there is any way that we can, you know, work with you to do something similar. It would be good if there was some kind of a racial and ethnic opportunities for internships, some fellowships with the OSCE, the State Department, the European and Eurasia Bureau. And I think in the long run we would probably do some things that would not

only be of significance to young people around this country, but it may be a statement to people around the globe. So if you have any ideas on that, I'm very eager to hear them.

REEKER:

Congressman, thank you for raising that. I would just point out that diversity and inclusion are extremely important topics to us at the Department of State, and certainly within the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. We were the first bureau to create a position that's focused on that. A foreign service officer is now incumbent in that job helping us in the bureau to design programs and engagement on the very topic of diversity and inclusion. And I think it sends a good message to our partners, certainly in the OSCE where you see in the Helsinki principles equal rights and self-determination of people, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. These are all critical principles that we're working on.

We have, at the Department of State, a number of fellowships, the Pickering and Rangel fellowship programs that help us in those regard. I found those over my career to be extremely useful, great ways also to recruit into the foreign service and our civil service mentorships. We have a mentoring program for our more junior colleagues. And something we stress is diversity and inclusion.

I think it would be great if we could keep in touch on that. And certainly our mission at the OSCE under Ambassador Gilmore, just like all of our 50 missions, 79 posts across the European Bureau's area of responsibility, take these issues very seriously and are always working on efforts to improve to that regard.

CLEAVER: Thank you. Thank you.

CARDIN: Senator Whitehouse.

WHITEHOUSE: Thank you very much, Chairman Cardin. I appreciate it. I'll speak very briefly because I have to go right now down to the floor for Senator Udall's farewell address. But I did want to flag that as we're dealing with these issues there are two things that I think are very important.

One is – under the Biden administration – the U.S. stepping forward to deal with climate change and to encourage renewable energy. I think the more we do, the more we achieve the collateral benefit of hampering the petro-politics of Vladimir Putin in this region. The more that countries can stand up on their own, with their own internal renewable resources, the less vulnerable they are to the pressures and persuasions of Putin and his petro-politics.

The second is that the more we are pushing back on the ability of foreign kleptocrats to hide their stolen assets overseas, the more we're disabling that kind of behavior and deterring that kind of behavior. And right now in the NDAA, thanks to really good work on the House side and very strong bipartisan work on the Senate side – with particular thanks to Chairman Crapo – we have the first real incorporation of transparency legislation, building on Senator Cardin's good work to make sure that the financial – FinCEN, the Treasury financial center – has

the ability to look into who's behind shell corporations in America. And the more we can lead globally on this, the more we can make it hard for kleptocrats and crooked politicians to find sanctuary in the rule of law world for their stolen goods, the more we deter the kind of behavior that we want to deter.

So I wanted to flag those two issues as I head to the floor. I think we stand to make enormous collateral, diplomatic, and political gains if we're really leaning forward on renewable energy, particularly in the region that Putin services with his petro-politics, and that if we're really leaning in on trying to make sure that there is not safe sanctuary for corruption in our system and in other rule-of-law systems. So the Helsinki Commission is really important in helping to press these goals. And thank you for letting me drop in that short statement then before I head off to see our colleague Tom.

CARDIN: Thank you, Senator Whitehouse.

I really want to underscore the points you made about corruption, and Ambassador Reeker talked about in his opening statement. Clearly we're excited about Europe adopting the Global Magnitsky statute, but we were disappointed it did not include any provisions on corruption. And I know we really do need stronger commitments globally to deal with the corrosive influence of corruption in all of our states. And as we have made progress in stopping modern day slavery and trafficking, and we have standards that have been adopted through our process and accepted globally, I think we need to make a comparable effort in regards to anticorruption activities. So I know that the administration's been strong on this. And I thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for your comments. And I think Senator Whitehouse is trying to act and has acted very responsibly in the NDAA bill. It gives us additional tools to fight corruption.

Do you want to make comments? Fine.

REEKER: Just briefly. I'd note, and thank you, Senator Cardin but also Senator Whitehouse for mentioning that. You know, beneficial ownership is a critical area that we need to focus on more. And it gets right at that corruption issue. Energy diversity, diversity of supply is something we focused on a lot in Europe. Our dealing and engagement on the Nord Stream 2 project, which we see as highly irresponsible, is an example. This is a geostrategic project on behalf of Vladimir Putin that we think is entirely counter to the interests of our friends and allies in Europe becoming more reliant on Russian energy. I agree on the focus on renewables. There's U.S. technology and opportunities there. And this fits nicely into the OSCE second dimension, economic and environmental issues. And we'll be sure to keep in touch on that. We look forward to reviewing the relevant NDAA provisions, and to implementing those effectively. Thank you.

CARDIN: Thank you.

Congressman Cohen.

COHEN: Thank you, Chairman Cardin.

The last time we were planning an OSCE CODEL on anti-Semitism – and of course, we had to put the idea on hold due to the coronavirus. I was curious, Mr. Ambassador, how are anti-Semitism flare-ups in Europe now? Have they continued? Are they rising?

REEKER: Thanks, Congressman. It's something I think you and I discussed perhaps in Munich on the margins of the security conference there. It's something that we look at very closely. As you know, the department has a Special Envoy for combatting anti-Semitism, Elan Carr. And in fact, I've been engaging with him quite a bit in the last few days. It falls into the broader framework, of course, of promoting and protecting religious freedom, which is a key foreign policy priority. There are, unfortunately, significant religious freedom concerns within the OSCE region. Anti-Semitism being one of them, but also – I hate to point again to Russia – they continue their persecution, torture, and imprisonment of Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslim minority groups, the Falun Gong, other religious minorities.

The Department publishes an annual report on anti-Semitism, as well as an annual international religious freedom report. And I think cooperation with our allies is essential at the OSCE as well. This issue falls squarely in the human dimension. And it's just something we need to remain vigilant about and fully engaged. I think it's an area where we can actually be very proud of what we've stood up for. Never eliminated, but we make progress where and as we can, and I appreciate your support for it.

COHEN: Mr. Ambassador, I visited Hungary and there, I was told by many of the groups that there were a lot of anti-Semitic dog whistles concerning George Soros and others. The Hungarians deny it. Is Hungary the worst? And if not, who's challenging them for that dastardly position of being the most anti-Semitic, intolerant nation of OSCE countries?

REEKER: Certainly, I've spoken with our ambassador who recently departed, Ambassador Cornstein, from Hungary. And he's spoken on that subject. I'd say that we engage broadly with governments, including those of our allies and partners like Hungary, throughout the world on this topic. And we've been very clear in expressing concerns, whether it's to the government of Hungary or other countries. And it goes not just for manifestations of anti-Semitism when they arise, and that includes coded speech, but it goes to pointing out other challenges in terms of OSCE commitments. And we do that in a spirit of principled engagement with friends and allies, and really that's certainly what the OSCE stands for, being able to raise those issues.

And our embassy in Budapest, as our embassies all throughout the OSCE region, as well as our OSCE mission itself remains very committed and focused on monitoring those things. And you'll see it in the reports that we put out, working closely with the special envoy for combatting anti-Semitism. And here in the European Bureau, I'd point out too we have the special envoy for Holocaust issues, which also addresses some of those issues as we focus on Holocaust education, renumeration, and dealing with some of these long-term issues that arise in different parts of Europe, engaging on behalf of Americans and on behalf of our principles.

COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

CARDIN: Congressman Cohen, let me point out on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly, as the special representative on anti-Semitism, racism and intolerance, there is a rise of hate, nationalism, and anti-Semitism throughout the OSCE region. Clearly Hungary has been a major concern, with what they've done in regards to the use of anti-Semitism in their campaigns. But they're not unique. There is a rise throughout Europe. So it's a matter of major concern. And we are implementing policies to try to use best practices to counter that. But thank you for raising it. I appreciate it very much.

Representative Veasey.

VEASEY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ambassador, you mentioned the Helsinki Final Act earlier. And I wanted to ask you specifically about that, because during the 1975 time period when Gerald Ford was president, there was an issue about radio jamming that was of big concern to the Soviet Union at that time. And when you go back and you look at the declaration of principles guiding relations between participating states, two of the areas that we've talked about right now – human rights, the freedom of thought, self-determination of peoples – all of those things were hugely important. But things like radio have changed over the years.

Here in the U.S. and in other parts of the world, including participating states, there is now social media, there are podcasts, and there are other ways that people are able to spread information, including people who wish to air concerns about current government structures. What are you hearing participating states say about this new technology and how it needs to be addressed officially from participating states as we move forward?

REEKER: Thanks, Congressman. That's a great question. And it falls into that whole area of hybrid, new technology, cyber issues that affect all three of the OSCE's security dimensions. It's not just about political-military issues but the human dimension as well. And frankly, the OSCE is a great place to address this, and they are doing that. One of the four leadership positions that was filled when the slate received consensus at the close of the ministerial was the new representative for freedom of the media. And that position is based in Vienna with the rest of the OSCE headquarters. And Teresa Ribeiro, who was a candidate for Portugal, will be the new representative. And these are the kind of issues that she will look at.

I'd be happy to check in with Ambassador Gilmore and his team on any of the latest developments there. But I think it is a very important thing to highlight. And since you brought up the Helsinki principles, which we are commemorating 45 years since their adoption, remain just as relevant even as things like the technology change. And I'd remind you that one of those principles is cooperation among states. And so we've got to hold each other accountable to that, and fulfillment in good faith obligations under international law. There may be some spaces there that need to be worked on, but I think the OSCE once again gives us the institutional framework and platform in which to address that.

VEASEY: Thank you very much. I appreciate it, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

CARDIN: Representative Jackson Lee.

JACKSON LEE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for bringing us together, as well as Chairman Hastings for asking you to do so, along with Senator Wicker. This is important work that we're doing. Mr. Ambassador, thank you so very much for your work. And if I might, I may sound like I'm giving you a roll call, but I'd appreciate if you can see the connectedness to it.

First of all, let me thank the Helsinki Commission for all of the work they did with my office in preparing the Rodchenkov anti-doping legislation. We started this about three or four years ago, and it is now law. The president signed H.R. 835 into law on December 4th. It was certainly a day of celebration in my office. And this truly was attributable to my staff, and the Commission staff, and the commissioners. So I want to recognize the work we did at the OSCE, but also at our own hearings.

I see a completely different perspective on Europe coming from the Biden administration now, three weeks or so away. But I would appreciate your thoughts about the need for a change in attitude. We certainly, as members of the OSCE and supporters of the OSCE relationship with the United States, have certainly been dedicated in our commitment to these relationships. But if you might comment on all of that.

Also, you might take note that the leadership gaps at the OSCE, I'm very shocked by the vacancies. in the positions of secretary-general, the director for the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media. So you might want to comment on that and suggest how we can be effective in helping to encourage that leadership be placed in these important positions.

But the other point that I'd like to wrap into this question – so the three segments: (1) new attitudes towards Europe and the OSCE, and then (2) these points on leadership vacancies and now (3) the strengthening of NATO. Obviously, NATO is not the OSCE, but I think the issues that NATO promotes should be part of what we encourage in terms of the security relationships that we have with Europe. And then, George Floyd impacted the world. And Europeans expressed their connectedness to the issue of race relations, and brutality in law enforcement. I'd welcome your thoughts about that.

And finally the question of refugees. Can we restore our commitment and Europe's commitment to welcoming refugees? I think of the Syrians and of some of the horrible sights that we have seen in years past of refugees on the shores, children dead. Leaders being attacked because they opened their doors for refugees. So I hope I got it in three chunks. I hope you will share your wisdom with us. Thank you, again. Thank you for this hearing.

REEKER: Thank you, Congresswoman. And I know this is one of those conversations I wish we could have on the margins of the Munich security conference or one of the other get-togethers. And I look forward to that opportunity again soon.

On the leadership question, I'm glad you raised it because I want to underscore again, we were really pleased that one of the outcomes of the ministerial that was just held at the end of last week was to finally fill those leadership positions. I agree with you, it was a grave concern to us in the Department that because of the consensus requirement and the individual member states holding up moving forward with the leaders going back to the summer, we really worked this. And you know, again, Ambassador Gilmore and his team deserve great credit for some excellent diplomacy.

Consensus is never easy to find, as you all know extremely well. But we did reach consensus on this slate. Helga Schmid, a highly respected German diplomat whom we know well, she's worked very closely this year with Deputy Secretary Biegun, her counterpart. She's currently with the European Union's External Action Service. She was selected to be the next secretary-general of the OSCE. Matteo Mecacci, who is an Italian expert, has been chosen as Director of the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ODIHR, a very important position.

I mentioned Teresa Ribeiro, who will be the new Representative for Freedom of the Media, also crucial in addressing some of these big challenges. And the fourth of the major leadership positions is to Kairat Abdrakhmanov who is a diplomat from Kazakhstan, who has been chosen as High Commissioner on National Minorities. And so it brings in that Central Europe role and engagement. It's important to have that leadership in place as we transition into the Swedish chairmanship in office.

The Albanians will continue to help as part of the troika. Looking ahead, the third part of the troika is Poland, that will have the chairmanship in office in 2022. And North Macedonia, our newest NATO member, has been selected to be chairman in office of OSCE in 2023. So there's continuity of leadership there, institutional leadership. But really there's a role for every member state, every one of the 57. And the U.S. intends to continue to do its part in that.

On some of the broader issues you raised, I just want to remind everyone that the fundamental basis of OSCE and the Helsinki Principles is that every participating state has a responsibility to counter discrimination, to uphold free speech rights of their citizens. And the state actors have to work with all relevant actors, including political and religious leadership and civil society to promote inclusion and unity. And that's important for us as a great nation, as an OSCE member state. It is an example that we can set.

You know, I often tell my colleagues in Europe, particularly when I worked in the Balkans, we set out in our Constitution to form a more perfect union. And we've never declared that we've gotten there. It is an aspiration that we continue to focus on. And that's important for every one of these member states. I think if some of the other countries in the OSCE, our partners there, even friends and allies would take a look at themselves, they would understand it's always an effort to improve in some of these areas, to address concerns.

We take advantage of the OSCE weekly Permanent Council meetings to publicly call attention to times when participating states aren't living up to their commitments. And they will do that with us as well. So we continue to look forward to working with the 56 other OSCE

participating states, to advance those kinds of initiatives, those ideals, those principles through the OSCE structures and institutions. And as far as NATO, I welcome that too. I mentioned earlier that last week we also had the NATO ministerial, virtually.

You do lose something without having those side conversations and the engagement of all 30 allies. But we can celebrate the fact that even in a year of COVID pandemic, we were able to bring in North Macedonia as the 30th ally, the 30th member of NATO. And that is a huge step forward, following on from the historic Prespa Agreement, which showed not only true and inspired leadership on the part of North Macedonia and of Greece to resolve longstanding issues, but also showcased the importance of U.S. diplomacy in supporting that effort.

One of the things at this NATO ministerial was the rollout of the NATO 2030 report prepared by a group known as the Forward-Looking Reflection Process, a group of wise men and women. One of the co-chairs of that group was my predecessor in this seat, Wess Mitchell, the former assistant secretary. It's a great report. I commend it to all of you and your staff. It's actually very readable as these things go, not too long. It sets out some recommendations and priorities for NATO moving forward.

It made very clear that NATO was actually doing extremely well. It remains, in my view, the preeminent global defensive alliance throughout history, frankly. We celebrated 70 years. It has shown itself to be adaptable in terms of strategy, dealing with the threats, expanding appropriately, and has great leadership with Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. And I'm very optimistic about U.S. leadership at NATO now and moving forward.

Thank you.

JACKSON LEE: Thank you.

CARDIN: Well, Mr. Ambassador, thank you for the presentation. I have one final question. Before I get there, I would like to just underscore the point that you made, that it's amazing the progress that we've been able to make in a consensus-based organization. The ministerial meeting is a good example. We were able to work out the administrative positions, which is always a challenge, but we were able to get it done.

So we've been able to operate within a consensus framework, but there are challenges. There are challenges to transparency, particularly in Vienna that we need to continue to work on. I underscore again that Ambassador Gilmore has really done a yeoman's job there to unmask a lot of the activities that take place in Vienna. We have a real challenge regarding so many participating states compromising civil society and watch groups, and therefore undermining a key part of the Helsinki process.

So we do have challenges. There's no question about it moving forward. And it is our responsibility and our right to challenge activities in any member state. And they can challenge what we're doing. And we have accepted that. And our Parliamentary Assembly delegation has brought up U.S. issues at international meetings. They're recognizing that they're legitimate for us to have those discussions.

I would like you, if you could, to focus one moment on Nagorno-Karabakh. The United States is one of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group. And as you pointed out, it is good that we have stopped the killings, at least temporarily. We've gotten somewhat of a ceasefire in place, and that is certainly progress. This is a frozen conflict. But I am concerned that it looks like we have not been able to advance the Minsk Group, and now we have Turkey and Russia who want to take over the resolution of this issue, which may not be in the interests of the United States or the parties.

Can you update us as to how you see the Minsk Group operating and how you see the U.S. role in trying to resolve this conflict?

REEKER: Thanks, Senator Cardin. I'm really so pleased you brought that up, because it is a conflict that has been much on my mind and on which we have been very much focused over the last several weeks. We did welcome, as you said, the cessation of hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, and deeply regret the brutal and certainly unnecessary loss of life that took place there, including many civilians. Those lives don't come back. We have continued to stress that there is no military solution to that longstanding conflict. In fact, there is that very structure you mentioned – the Minsk Group and the co-chairs – that are designed to help the two parties, that is Armenia and Azerbaijan, find a solution.

As you're very familiar, Senator, over the last nearly 30 years there have been some very near misses, we might say, of actually getting peace. I recall earlier in my career when we held the chairmanship of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs and held an intense round of talks in 2001 in Key West. We really thought we were almost there. It proved elusive. Again, a decade later efforts proved elusive. And the sporadic fighting that has broken out was really highlighted by this most recent effort.

It is important to point out that the Minsk Group and the co-chair process we believe has been successful in the sense that for most of that 30 years there has been a peace, if fragile. There has not been the kind of violence that we've seen when the war first emerged and the sporadic cases that broke out, including the most recent one. We continue to believe there's no long-term military solution to the conflict. Armenia's victory on the battlefield decades ago failed to end the conflict. We tried to hold the violence at bay through diplomacy, but it's doubtful that a pure military solution can result in a different outcome this time around. It has to be attained at the negotiating table. And we believe that the co-chairs represent the best opportunity for peace.

We're working with the other co-chair countries – Russia and France. We still have a lot of questions about the ceasefire that was put in place by Russia, including the role of Turkey. We were very concerned and expressed those concerns about Turkey's role, foreign fighters being brought in, and weapons being provided. These are issues that are of concern and remain part of our dialogue with Turkey, and certainly with Russia. Our co-chair, my colleague Andrew Schofer, is in Geneva meeting in the Geneva process about Georgia, a separate issue, but he will be going this weekend with the other co-chairs to both capitals, Baku and Yerevan, to see where we can try to move forward on the diplomatic solution of this.

It's something we'll watch closely. Again, it's something we need to continue to raise with other countries. OSCE is the right platform for this. And we can hope that a lasting peace is found so that we don't have to see the kind of loss of life and civilian suffering that we noted in the last couple of months. There's a lot more work to be done there in terms of seeing where things are. We are dedicating resources to trying to help the people of Nagorno-Karabakh in terms of what needs to be done for reconstruction, humanitarian assistance, and aid. And we'll be sure to keep in close touch with your office, with the Commission, as we move forward on this, Senator.

CARDIN: Well, I thank you for that update.

JACKSON LEE: Mr. Chairman?

CARDIN: Yes, who's that?

JACKSON LEE: It's Shelia Jackson Lee. Would you indulge me just for a brief –

CARDIN: Certainly. Representative Jackson Lee.

JACKSON LEE: Your question caused me to readdress to the ambassador, very quickly, what I was trying to get at when I mentioned George Floyd. And the chairman, Senator Cardin, mentioned it in a particular perspective. But my question was in the rise of totalitarianism in Europe and hate groups that may be defined around race. We were seeing it previously, and I think that fits right into the wheelhouse of the OSCE. And then the other point was we've been watching Belarus. And I didn't know if I'd missed hearing any update on their human rights or Russian, how can I say it, dominance in the OSCE region.. I don't know if you can answer that very quickly. And I yield back. And I thank the chairman for allowing me to raise those two points.

Mr. Ambassador, was I clear in that question – those two questions?

REEKER: Yes, ma'am. On Belarus, let me just add a couple more points where we are on that. The OSCE, again, came to the fore as we saw this unfortunate collapse of some of the progress we thought we might be seeing there. In terms of engagement, step-by-step engagement, the invocation of the Moscow Mechanism through OSCE helped to put the international spotlight on the really violent crackdown in response to peaceful citizens protesting about an election that was completely fraudulent.

And the rapporteur's report that came out of that Moscow Mechanism process provided recommendations for the Belarusian authorities. They have not taken advantage of that, which they should be obligated to do under their OSCE membership and commitments. But we're going to keep working to pressure Belarus to address those findings and recommendations. And that's why we do hope to see our candidate for an ambassador to Belarus confirmed, because we really think someone of Julie Fisher's experience and caliber will be crucial to helping us navigate in real time the complex dynamic situation there.

We've got a good team on the ground at our relatively small mission in Minsk. And I'd like to very much work with any and all of you in seeing that process move forward. And we're continuing to engage the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to push for her final confirmation. And she will be a great standard bearer for these very values and issues that we raised, and that the OSCE stands for.

JACKSON LEE: On race and hate crimes?

REEKER: Certainly, that's part of the OSCE platform. It falls squarely into the Helsinki Principles, respect for human rights and beliefs and fundamental freedoms. We are standing up against hate crimes, casting a spotlight on them and making sure that we address them, because it is in the interests of the people who are subjected to them but also because it is in our interest too and projects our values, which fit so squarely into the Helsinki principles.

JACKSON LEE: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CARDIN: Thank you, Representative Jackson Lee. Appreciate that. It was an important follow up question. Any other member of the Commission have any additional questions or comments?

If not, let me thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for spending so much time with us. It was a very comprehensive opening statement, and I appreciate that very much. You were very frank about the strengths and weaknesses and very clear about U.S. priorities going forward, which are consistent with, I think, the priorities that we have set in the Commission. So we are looking forward to an active year. And we are pleased that we had a successful ministerial meeting. And now we look to the new chair in office to see how those priorities will line up with us. We expect that we'll have a Commission hearing with the new chair in office and that we will plan our strategies accordingly.

So, again, thank you very much. And I want to thank the commissioners for so much participation in this meeting. And everybody stay safe. Is there any further word that I need to do under the procedures, or are we OK to adjourn?

NEFF: You are a-OK on the procedures.

CARDIN: Great.

REEKER: Let me just thank you Senator and thank all the members of the Commission. I look forward to keeping in close touch.

CARDIN: Thank you very much. And thank you again, Chairman Hastings, for allowing the hearing to go forward. And with that, the hearing is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:34 a.m., the hearing ended.]