

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

“Slovakia’s Chairmanship of the OSCE: Priorities and Challenges”

Committee Members Present:

**Representative Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL), Chairman;
Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS), Co-Chairman;
Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member;
Representative Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA);
Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO);
Representative Gwen Moore (D-WI)**

Witness:

**Miroslav Lajcak,
Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Slovak Republic**

**The Hearing Was Held From 3:31 p.m. To 4:54 p.m. in Room SVC 201-00,
Capitol Visitor Center, Washington, D.C., Representative Alcee L. Hastings
(D-FL), Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe,
presiding**

Date: Wednesday, April 3, 2019

HASTINGS: (Sounds gavel.) So this hearing will come to order. Mr. Chairperson, Mr. Foreign Minister, I warmly welcome you to the United States Congress. And thank you giving us the opportunity to hear your views as the OSCE chairperson in office. As you may know, this is the first hearing of the Helsinki Commission in the 116th Congress. I intend as chairperson – having had this role previously – I intend as chairperson to build and maintain active U.S. engagement in the OSCE based on principled foreign policy and a belief that we, and by “we” I mean here the United States, must practice what we preach. I will also continue the strong parliamentary diplomacy that has been the hallmark of this commission since it was created. Having previously served as the president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I know how important robust engagement from our legislative bodies is to the OSCE.

To foster this exchange, you and others should expect a robust calendar of hearings, like this one, chaired by myself and by other commissioners to explore all aspects of our partnership. I commend my colleagues from the Helsinki Commission, including co-chairman Wicker, who you have met, and may very well – he and Senator Cardin in different hearings. We call the Senate the other body. You know, they have so many things going on at a given time. But I commend them for their service in leadership roles in the assembly as well as your colleague, member of Slovak parliamentary – Slovak Parliament, Peter Osuský, who successfully headed the short-term election observation mission in Armenia last year. I did that one too another time in my life. OSCE election observation is and continues to be the gold standard. And we were happy to have OSCE observers here for our congressional elections last fall.

It would be a bit unfair if I were to let this moment pass and not divert from the written remarks to give you the history on how it was that we were able to allow for OSCE parliamentarians to come here. I was president of the Parliamentary Assembly at the time. And I approached Colin Powell, who was secretary of state at the time. And my office had been trying to arrange a meeting with the secretary. And they didn’t know that I had gone to college and graduated college with his wife. So I called Alma and told her I needed to have a meeting with Colin. And it was done.

And he went ahead at that time and scheduled for the very first time parliamentarians from the OSCE to come to the American elections. He told me later that he caught a lot of flak as a result of it. I know I did. I got hate mail and everything. But it was one of the most pleasant experiences that I’ve had, Mr. Minister, was to host five Russians in Fort Lauderdale, Florida during my elections. And I might add, this was the election in Florida where we had some substantial challenges. And so it was very good to have them there. But I just thought you would like that little vignette as to how it came that we did have election observers come from the Parliamentary Assembly. And I hope they always will.

If I may, I will also take one minute to commend another of your countrymen, President Andrej Kiska. President Kiska was honored recently by the German Council of Sinti and Roma for his leadership in countering anti-Roma racism. That is really a great honor for all of Slovakia. As you may know, the Commission has long championed efforts to promote the security and equality of Roma and supported the development of OSCE efforts to address anti-Semitism. And we were the first I might add, to address anti-Semitism. And at that particular

conference, we were mindful of how important it was that we keep the watered-down version of equality at bay. Also in the event we also addressed racism and other forms of intolerance, even towards black Europeans. Footnote right there as well.

When I joined the assembly, the majority leader now, Steny Hoyer, recruited me to become a member. And in my very, very first meeting we were discussing migration. And this was in the '90s. So we saw it coming. And someone said to me earlier: We didn't fix it. And we now have this ongoing problem. Efforts that embrace the entireties of our societies are critical to the future of the OSCE. And I hope that your country will continue its focus on this – these issues this year.

And, Mr. Minister, as you know, the Helsinki Commission's engagement with Slovakia dates to 1990, even before independence. And I was personally fortunate to have the opportunity to visit Slovakia. I congratulate Slovakia on the election of your new President Zuzana Caputova. And I hope I didn't butcher her name, and if I did you'll ask her to please forgive me. But it is wonderful to see your country in this leadership role today, chairing the 57-country OSCE. And I keep giving you these little vignettes. I swore in Montenegro as the 56th. And it's no easy task. And we're grateful that Slovakia has taken up this challenge.

As my colleagues, Senator Wicker and Cardin, wrote in the Woodrow Wilson Quarterly last fall, the OSCE's mission is as important as ever. And I'm very happy to be able to continue the Helsinki Commission's tradition of hosting a discussion with a country holding the OSCE chairmanship. And I look forward to hearing your views on how we can best meet the challenges that we face together.

And for the purposes of our audience that has assembled, and those who don't know him, the chairperson Miroslav Lajcak – I've circulated your full biography, so I won't repeat all of it here. But I would like to note a few things in particular. Minister Lajcak is a career diplomat with a distinguished career serving both his country and the international community. In addition to representing Slovakia in numerous positions, he served as high commissioner – high representative of the international community and special representative of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was a key figure in the mediation of the post-conflict crisis in the western Balkans, and negotiated, organized, and supervised the referendum on the independence of Montenegro. Most recently, he served as president of the United Nations General Assembly, where he advocated for dialogue, strengthening multilateralism, and serving the needs of all people. And I join you in that enormous quest for strengthening multilateralism. I would that more of our friends throughout the world had the same views as you and I in that particular respect.

The floor is yours, sir.

LAJCAK: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To members of the Helsinki Commission, ladies and gentlemen, it's a great honor for me to address you today.

And it's a very special occasion for me to be here as a chairperson-in-office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in such a symbolic year, marking the 30th

anniversary of the extraordinary events of 1989, when the people of Czechoslovakia rose up to peacefully demand their liberty. For so many years, our nation had seen the dreams deferred, but never lost faith. Those students, artists, workers helped usher in the historic wave of freedom that swept across Central and Eastern Europe. Our federation, with its newly found freedom, even took on chairing the OSCE in 1992, before forming our two independent states on January 1st, 1993.

The democratization road from that point was rocky and I experienced it myself as a young diplomat at the time. But I am very proud that today Slovakia sits at the table with nations which hold democratic values high, whether at the European Union, the OSCE or NATO. The road to that table was long. But we had a backup. The OSCE and the Helsinki Commission engaged in this road from the beginning until today, when we ourselves actively pass on our experience and expertise with democratic transition. And we are ready to do more, to contribute more.

That's why we have decided to take on the OSCE chairmanship this year, because we believe in multilateralism. We believe in nations coming together, building foundations of trust and working together to advance security and prosperity. We believe in the story of Helsinki. This story ties together 57 states spanning three continents, helping to make security, human rights and rule of law a reality for over a billion people. We in Slovakia are very proud of this story, and we are very excited to stand at the helm of this organization, because 44 years later we believe the potential to unlock is still incredibly vast.

Local know-how. Presence on the ground. Outstanding expertise. We must rediscover the niche value of this organization, because there are crises on our doorstep. And what is even more disturbing, we are experiencing challenges not only outside, but also within. The rising tides of isolationism and unilateralism are putting our carefully crafted post-war order at risk. The stakes are high. And they concern the issues that are at the core of this commission. So I am very glad to be here with you, to share an overview of the agenda we set for our year, and I'm looking forward to hearing your views.

Let me now summarize our priorities in three main points. First, I want to talk about preventing and resolving conflicts and mitigating their impact on people. And here, let me right away turn to the crisis in and around Ukraine. This commission has been steadfast in supporting the aspirations of the Ukrainian people for human rights and democracy. And we wish to see our biggest neighbor safe and prosperous. And to make this a reality, there is no alternative to the Minsk agreements. That's why we strongly support existing formats, in particular the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group, as well as the U.S. engagement through the efforts of Ambassador Kurt Volker.

But we cannot simply wait for progress to happen. There are too many people suffering as we speak. So while we focus on supporting solutions agreed at the negotiating table, we are also working on concrete measures aimed at improving lives of people caught up in the midst of the crisis. To put it bluntly, retaining focus on the big picture should not blind us to the urgent and real needs of the people on the ground. They range from repairing the damaged Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, the entry-exit point on the line of contact, to humanitarian demining. We put

together specific proposals of nine confidence-building measures. And in February, I had the chance to discuss them with Ministers Klimkin and Lavrov separately. And I did not hear “no” a single time. So I hope we can work together to bring these proposed steps forward in the coming months.

These steps are, of course, going to be influenced by the results of the presidential elections in Ukraine and the political climate they will bring. So our chairmanship fully supports the statement of preliminary findings and conclusions issued by the international election observation mission. According to the preliminary report, the elections were competitive. Voters had a broad choice and turned out in large numbers. However, law was often not implemented in good faith. Numerous credible indications of misuse of state resources and vote-buying undermined the credibility of the process.

On this example and many more, the role of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation is once again proving crucial. It contributes to consolidation of democracy in the OSCE region. And that’s why OSCE-participating states must do everything possible to allow these missions to work unimpeded. This commission has observed virtually every national election in Ukraine since 1990. Even though the years have passed, and crisis hit, your focus has not dimmed. And I look forward to working with the United States in our ongoing efforts with Kyiv and Moscow to take steps forward.

While the crisis in and around Ukraine occupies much of our attention, we are equally engaged in other parts of the OSCE area. The organization works towards conflict resolution and mediation in Transnistria, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh. I have recently visited them all. From Moldova, where we have seen some real momentum in the Transnistrian settlement process which we can build on. Then onto Georgia, where our chairmanship fully backs existing formats and remains committed to the Geneva international discussions and the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms. And again, here as well, we aim to focus on projects that could bring about small, but concrete, results and improvement on the situation for people on the ground. And in Nagorno-Karabakh, while there has been some positive developments we need to see a lot more before talking about real progress.

I will visit Central Asia next week and trips around the western Balkans are on the books, with the aim to address the challenges we are facing right on the spot. We believe the OSCE’s equipped with many tools we need to overcome these challenges. And we are dedicating our chairmanship to developing and making better use of them. But this also means spotting new opportunities, like the inclusion of young people in peace processes, or gender mainstreaming and greater participation of women in the security field. And here, I’d take the opportunity to acknowledge the work of my special representative on gender, Ambassador Melanne Vermeer.

So for our second priority, we will focus on what lies ahead of us to achieve a safer future for all, in particular young people. Our societies are different to what they were 44 years ago when our organization was founded. Cyberterrorism, use of technology in organized crime and trafficking in persons – these are issues people could hardly imagine in the mist of the Cold War. But today, we find ourselves confronted with them daily, and they are completely resistant to any

unilateral solutions. So we need to lead a dialogue, we need to open up space for emerging themes within the OSCE.

To this end, our chairmanship has many conferences on our agenda, dealing with issues from terrorism to cyber security, to call attention to new trends and explore potential for collaborative impact. Two conferences already took place in Bratislava. The first one addressed challenges in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, and best practices in combating modern-day anti-Semitism. And here, I want to thank you very much for the United States and this Commission's support, especially to Senator Cardin and also to the newly appointed U.S. special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism, Mr. Elan Carr. We were happy to welcome Mr. Carr in Bratislava just a day after his appointment, along with my personal representative on combating Anti-Semitism, Rabbi Andrew Baker.

Our second conference, just last week, focused on preventing and countering terrorism as well as violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. In preparation, we took due note of the briefing on counterterrorism organized by Congressman Hudson in December last year. It was very symbolic that our conference took place in the immediate aftermath of the destruction of the last Daesh stronghold. And, the message from the discussions was very clear: This is not a time to get comfortable. Terrorism and violent extremism pose as grave a threat as ever. And, it continues to evolve. We need to address the root causes and stay one step ahead. That's why we, at the OSCE, need to continue updating and adapting our toolbox – so the future does not catch us unprepared.

The role of the Helsinki Commission in bringing new developments and trends to light is invaluable. You keep us alert to emerging challenges – from human trafficking and shrinking space for critical voices from civil society to the protection of national minorities. And here I would underline our commitment to all mandated human dimension events, namely Human Dimension Implementation Meeting and Human Dimension Seminar in Warsaw, and three supplementary human dimension meetings in Vienna. The first one just took place before yesterday and yesterday.

Slovakia places high importance on advancing the protection of the safety of journalists, especially after last year's horrendous murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, which left Slovakia in absolute shock. Support for the protection of journalists has been expressed through last year's Ministerial Council decision – one of two in adopted the human dimension after several years. And we are working closely with all three independent institutions of the organizations, namely Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, High Commissioner on National Minorities, and Representative on Freedom of the Media.

But to advance these themes, to advance our security and cooperation, we must band together. And it appears the world has started to forget the value of multilateralism – this fundamental problem-solving and war-preventing tool in international relations, the *raison d'être* of the OSCE. So our third priority is to promote effective multilateralism. Both within and outside the OSCE. Within because the comparative advantage brought by representation is so broad that it brings parties with entirely contradicting interests to the same room every week is

immense. And outside, by promoting OSCE's strategic partnerships with other international bodies.

Just last month, I was in New York to brief the United Nations Security Council and engage on strengthening ties between the OSCE and the United Nations. I have done the same at the European Union Foreign Affairs Council, at NATO's North Atlantic Council, and Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers' Deputies. And promoting partnerships also means connecting with nongovernmental actors – think tanks, women's groups, youth networks and other civil society partners – because while these organizations differ in mandate, membership or functions, these differences do not play to our disadvantage.

To the contrary, there is a wide space for complementarity of actions to bring not only enhanced coherence and effectiveness but also better use of resources. We must remember one thing: While our roles vary in many key aspects, the context of our activities remains the same. We are here to work for a safer and more democratic region, where every individual enjoys security and individual rights. In this globalized and inter-connected age, working together on multilateral platforms is not a luxury we can afford to opt out of. It is inevitable if we want to safeguard peace and prosperity to our people. And the OSCE is the platform to do just that.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission, I truly welcome this opportunity to engage with you today. And it was very useful to meet many congressional delegates at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly gathering in Vienna on 21st February, because the representatives chosen directly by people are the best link between the organization and those it was created to serve. You bring the local knowledge. You bring the outlook from outside the meeting halls. You know best what concerns the people you represent. In that way, you are key in making the OSCE people-responsive.

So I am very much looking forward to our discussion and I thank you for the attention you have given me today. Thank you.

HASTINGS: Thank you so very much. It's deeply appreciated. You were very clear, concise, and to the point, your excellency. And I genuinely appreciate that. We've been joined by one of my colleagues, Commissioner Brian Fitzpatrick, who spent a considerable portion of his career before coming to Congress in Ukraine. So he and I both have our Ukrainian experiences. I don't know whether you were made aware, but I was the lead election observer after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. And the follow on to that was in Armenia when I was the lead observer. I wore an orange tie. And The New York Times reported that I was bringing the Orange Revolution to Armenia. (Laughter.) I mean, little things can – you have to pay attention to what it is you do.

I didn't take the advantage at the beginning because I knew others would come, but I'd also like to take one moment to recognize Slovakia's ambassador to the United States, His Excellency Ivan Korcok. Wave your hand so we'll know who you are. And I don't know that my colleague came here, but he is one of my dearest friends in Congress, Congressperson Peter Visclosky, who is from the Slovak Caucus in the House of Representatives. And Peter never asked me to join that Caucus, so I'm going to tell him I'm joining. (Laughter.) It's just that

simple. If I'm not already – I probably am already a member, but I'll make it a point that I do become one. And my colleague, Congressperson Jim Banks. I don't know whether Jim is here or not, but he's from the Slovak Caucus in the House of Representatives.

And if you don't mind, Brian, I'll start out with the questioning and then turn to you. And we're expecting that Roger might have an opportunity to stop by. He or Ben, we don't know just yet.

But, Mr. Chairperson, you've had an opportunity to make a few visits to OSCE countries. And I remarked to you of the chairs in office that I have known – and I have known six personally and gotten to know them extremely well when I was president of the Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE. I know none that have made as many visits as you have in the short time that you are in office. But in making these visits this year to Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, not to mention the conflict areas that have been with us quite some time, did you have an opportunity to meet with civil society during your visits, or during this visit to the United States?

LAJCAK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And yes, indeed, we want to be and trying to be a very active and a useful chairmanship. And therefore we are wasting no time. We've only got one year if we want to make a difference. And therefore I paid my first visit to Ukraine already in mid-January, which was followed immediately by visit to Moldova. Later on, I visited Azerbaijan, Armenia, and before that, Georgia. These were the visits focusing on the crisis area – whether they're hot crises, or not conflicts, or protracted conflicts. And I dedicated my attention to engaging with policymakers.

At the same time, engagement with civil society is very high on our agenda. Civil society was present in two high-level events that we've already convened in Slovakia, the conferences I was referring to. I'm going to visit Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan next week. And the meetings with the civil society are part of my schedule, as they will be part of my schedule in visiting other three countries of the Central Asia or the western Balkans regions. And I'm also planning to organize a special meeting in Vienna with the civil societies from the crises regions to hear their view. So we intend to engage, and we will do that. And we obviously also expect the participation of civil society at the ministerial meeting in December.

HASTINGS: That's very much appreciated. We know we're having difficulties in certain locales. And I've experienced it, as you have. I've also experienced the critical positive nature that the NGOs bring to developing societies, with their now OSCE mandate and our mission as we go forward. Said to you earlier that when I joined this organization we, in my very first meeting, had a whole afternoon session on migration. And this was in the '90s. And so how OSCE countries address migration is becoming key to the preservation of democracy, people, and unity in much of the OSCE region, with well-deserved, and well-designed, and fairly implemented migration and integration policies also having a positive effect on combatting intolerance.

While efforts such as the OSCE High Commission on National Minorities work on so-called new minorities and advancing best practices, such as those reflected in Ljubljana

Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies, be continued and revisited for possible implementation, and what other plans are there within ODIHR to address areas that impact human rights, and the social and economic integration of migrants, such as protecting against employment discrimination and ensuring equal access to quality education and housing, in addition to combatting hate crimes.

And I regret to say this, that I highlight the fact that the first meeting that I attended discussed migration, but every meeting thereafter that I attended, well on into 2008, as I remember, had equivalent discussions with reference to migration. So I leave you with the question, Mr. Minister.

LAJCAK: Well, you are asking the right question, Mr. Chairman. (Laughter.) Migration is obviously a question – or an issue that is very high on the agenda not only for the OSCE but for other international organizations, and also for national governments. And last year was a very important year related to migration also in my career, because in July I was applauding as the president of the United Nations General Assembly, and I had tears in my eyes, when General Assembly agreed on the text of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration – the first ever multilateral document trying to address the issue of migration from the global perspective and trying to manage. And then in November I submitted my resignation as the foreign minister of Slovakia when my country – my own country – pulled out of signing this document. So migration is very close to my heart.

When I speak about effective multilateralism, it's also about better complementarity and synergy with other international organizations. So right now we believe the lead in addressing the issues of migration belongs to the United Nations. After the meeting in Marrakesh, after the adoption of the Global Compact, there are meetings discussing the implementation of this document. And at the same time, for European nations, the European Union is another platform where migration is discussed very thoroughly and in great detail. So migration is present in discussions within the OSCE, because simply it's present in our daily lives. But it's not formally among the priorities for our chairmanship, because we simply don't want to interfere with the work of other international bodies and partners. But obviously, as I said, wherever you go, whoever you talk to, this issue is part of the debate, because it's part of our daily life. And I'm very sorry to say that we are still struggling. We are still reacting. We are still somehow going through painful process to find the right answers to this global phenomenon.

HASTINGS: Right. and I think you're onto where we will resolve it, if at all, and that is with multilateralism. It isn't going to come about – I mean, each country can do its own thing, as it were, and will, but we are better when we work together in that – in that regard.

We've also been joined by the new ranking member of our Helsinki Commission, and that is Congressman Joe Wilson from South Carolina. And, Joe, I'm going to ask one more question now and then ask Brian and then come back to you, if you don't mind.

WILSON: Excellent.

HASTINGS: OK. Real good.

Close to my concern, in light of the fact that I'm one of the prime movers – I sound like a bragging society up here sometimes, but I'm proud of the work that I've done in the OSCE over the years – but I was one of the prime movers in creating the Mediterranean Partners. And just as how when you were meeting with NATO you can get them to understand something: We did the Mediterranean partners in the Parliamentary Assembly before they got involved in NATO. So they kind of got the idea from us, I like to think – although, they were on their way as well.

At the last ministerial council in Milan, the participating states passed a declaration on security and cooperation in the Mediterranean. The declaration called for Mediterranean-related issues to be clearly reflected throughout the relevant work of the OSCE across the three dimensions of comprehensive security, among other things. How do you plan to use your chairmanship to advance the goals of this declaration? Are there other initiatives regarding the Mediterranean Partners and the region in general that you wish to pursue? And what are the main obstacles you perceive to enhancing cooperation with and among the Mediterranean Partners for cooperation?

And, Mr. Minister, when I was extremely active I spent a considerable amount of time in this arena. As a matter of fact, I think I'm the only chair of the Parliamentary Assembly that visited all six of the Mediterranean Partners on more than one occasion. I still consider it critical for us. For example, in the area of migration, how could we really ignore Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt and Israel, and then have discussions about migration knowing full well that all of them are having either similar problems or perpetuating parts of our problems, dependent upon what transpires in terms of their people leaving their countries? So toward that end, I leave you with the country. And then, Brian, if you would.

LAJCAK: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And as you know very well, the troika model in the OSCE works quite efficiently. And there is also a division of labor within the troika. So last year when Slovakia was still incoming chairmanship, we were already responsible for Mediterranean Partnership. So we organized a meeting in Malta and I was presiding over the meeting in end of October. The meeting was dedicated to particular issue of energy, and energy cooperation, energy security. But you are very much right, Mr. Chairman, saying that, I mean, all three dimensions of the OSCE work are very relevant. And when speak about migration, of course Mediterranean Partners are extremely important.

So we have – I'm very glad that we have this platform. You asked, where I see the challenges. Well, I was a bit disappointed that we did not have a political representation from our six Mediterranean Partners. And obviously we'd – I used to be a bureaucrat myself, but you have a different level of discussion among politicians and among experts. And this is a platform that OSCE is offering to partners. And I ask, what is wrong? Why the partners do not show up at the level that the OSCE-participating states are showing up? So this is what we need to explore. And we are working on it. Malta is proposing, creating a position of the special representative for Mediterranean Partnership, if it will bring an added value.

What we want is to use the platforms for a meaningful dialogue. We are all busy people. We have so many responsibilities. So to go to meetings with little value added is just a waste of

time. But I believe in this importance of this dimension, the Mediterranean dimension of the OSCE work. So I really hope that we will be able to use the potential of this platform.

HASTINGS: Let me ask you to do, as I'm going to do, and that's to ask George if he would use his good offices – that our Parliamentary Assembly chair. I spent a lot of time. And it was personal time, a lot of it calls and exchanges. And I know him extremely well. And I know you do as well. So let's pressure him to see if he can pull them together for, if nothing more – where are we meeting, Luxembourg? In Luxembourg and see if we can get as many of them as possible there. All right? Thank you.

Brian.

LAJCAK: Will do.

FITZPATRICK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Pleasure to be with you on the Commission here. Sir, congratulations. Thank you for being here. And you come from a very beautiful country. I spent a little bit of time Bratislava as an FBI agent. And it's a great city and a beautiful country. Congratulations on all the progress your country has made as well.

I want to touch on two issues, one specific to Ukraine another more general. The annexation of Crimea, the ongoing invasion in eastern Ukraine in the Donbas region. I'm the co-chair of the Ukrainian Caucus here in Congress. There's been some concern regarding military training, lack of support in Donbas, and the precedent that we're setting by allowing an annexation to occur in clear violation of international law with impunity. What role do you think this Commission should play, and yourself?

And second, on the broader issue of corruption, the majority of my time I spent in Ukraine was standing up the – they call it the NABU, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau. It was designed to fight high-level corruption at higher levels of the government, which is clearly a problem in Ukraine and in many parts of that region – parts of the world as well. And so many of the challenges, when we look at economic instability, political instability, human rights violations, they're symptomatic of what we consider the root cause issues – one of which is corruption. It's a huge problem in many regions of the world. What would you like to see our Commission do in partnership with you to help that, because it's something I'm very, very passionate about?

LAJCAK: Ukraine is, of course, the top of our list of priorities as the chairmanship of the OSCE, for obvious reasons, because we have a hot conflict. People are suffering. People are dying on a daily basis. And we need to do something about it. At the same time, Ukraine is our neighbor for Slovakia. So we have been very active in assisting Ukraine ever since the beginning. And let me remind you that by building the gas interconnection, Slovakia allowed for a reverse flow of gas from Europe to Ukraine, and thus guaranteeing the energy independence – energy security for Ukraine. And this has really changed the picture, because Ukraine could no longer be blackmailed through the gas negotiations.

My first visit took me to Ukraine. On 15th of January I went to Kyiv. I met with the prime minister, minister of foreign affairs, but also minister of defense. And I asked them: What can we do together? What can we achieve together? This is a particular year. You have presidential elections, you have parliamentary elections. But this is not an excuse to do nothing because, as I said, the people are suffering. So I said, let us try to identify what we can do together. Next day I – and I have to say that – I will come to it. We had a very good discussion with our partners.

Next day I went to the only crossing point in the Luhansk area, the bridge, Stanytsia Luhanska. And it's really a very sobering experience when you see more than 10,000 crossing this bridge daily, waiting in lines to get all the permissions, and then walking for two kilometers. Most of these people with difficulties to walk. And the bridge is damaged and needs to be repaired. And there is the famous lack of political will to agree on parameters, even though the project is there, the budget is there. So we put the repairing of the Stanytsia Luhanska Bridge on top of list of things we want to accomplish.

I referred to this list. There are nine concrete measures. This is number one. And I am also using my meeting with the U.S. partners to ask for the U.S. support. There are issues like protecting civilian infrastructure, humanitarian mine action, exchange of detainees, for example, addressing environmental challenges. And this is what we want to do so that people see that we care, because they don't have this feeling. They are very disappointed. They are very frustrated. They think nobody really cares about it.

The issue of annexation of Crimea is the issue that we have been addressing very clearly. And I – not agree fully with you that Russia got away with impunity, because there was immediate reaction from the international community. And sanctions were introduced at the level of European Union. And the sanctions are still enforced. NATO changed its strategic posture, has reinforced the eastern flank as a consequence of this, and there are many other measures.

We've recently – well, issued number of statements reminding ourselves of the fifth anniversary since this illegal annexation. I spoke about it in my opening speech to the OSCE Permanent Council in January. And we made it very clear that this issue will not disappear. So but what we need to do is to demonstrate the Ukrainian people that the international community is with them, so that they don't feel abandoned.

And the issue of corruption is – unfortunately, it's a plague that is present in the society. And what is very important is that we speak about it and that we demand action. And your Commission has a very high credibility speaking about these issues. So I would like to encourage you to raise these issues. But let's make it very clear that the corruption cannot be addressed by adopting laws, but only by implementing laws. So there is a big distance between adoption and introduction into real life, and implementation. So let's judge our partners and friends, not by number of laws they have adopted but by the effectiveness with which they are implementing these laws, and with the impact these laws are having on the functioning of the society. And this will help them. And this will help all of us.

HASTINGS: Thank you. Before going to you, Joe, I'd like to introduce Senator Cory Gardner, who has joined us. And then Joe and then Cory. I ask, was that a vote that you were called –

GARDNER: It was a quorum call.

HASTINGS: Quorum call. So you all have an hour to get to the quorum call. (Laughter.) Go ahead, Joe.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for welcoming me to the Commission at the Capitol building. I look forward to working together with you. And it's particularly significant, Chairperson, to be here with you with the Republic of Slovakia. I had the opportunity – one of the first things I heard when I got here was the importance of NGOs. Well, I know it personally. In 1995, I participated in lecturing in Slovakia. I found out the extraordinary history of Bratislava, what a beautiful country Slovakia is, the heart of Europe. And I then had the opportunity to work with the Ambassador Peter Burian very closely. And he came to my home state to observe a presidential primary. And as the voters were leaving, we were shaking hands and I was introducing the Slovak ambassador. And we found out that a high percentage had Slovak heritage. So that we have a shared heritage that we greatly appreciate. And I wish you well on your service.

LAJCAK: Thank you very much, sir.

WILSON: And over the years, you've been very active in Balkan affairs, including as the high representative in Bosnia and as a moderator or mediator during the Montenegrin independence referendum. Now that you chair the OSCE, what challenges do you see still in the region? And what role can the OSCE play in meeting the challenges? We're glad to see the progress in relations between Greece and North Macedonia, but do you have any optimism concerning developments in Bosnia, or in relations between Serbia and Kosovo?

LAJCAK: Thank you. Thank you, sir. And you might know that Peter Burian is now the European Union special representative for Central Asia.

WILSON: Hear, hear.

LAJCAK: And he's doing a great job there. Yes. And we are very proud of him.

WILSON: Best wishes to him.

LAJCAK: I'll see him very soon, yes.

Western Balkans is a region that has made significant progress since the end of the tragic Yugoslav War. And we do not face, let's say, security challenges – challenges to peace. But there are many other challenges. The process of transformation of their societies, and I would say Europeanization of their societies, is uneven. And of course, we have success stories, countries like Croatia that is already a member of the European Union and NATO, or we have

Albania and Montenegro, who are members of NATO, and then we have Bosnia-Herzegovina that is struggling. Of course, Kosovo's struggling with its identity. So we need to keep our eye and pay our attention to the region. We need to stay engaged.

I'm absolutely convinced that the best future the region is a European future. That means the future membership in the European Union. And they have this promise. What is really important is that this goal is seen as credible, realistic, and tangible. That there is no feeling of European Union moving the goalposts, because if we want European reforms, and they are very painful, they need to see the endgame, which is the membership. And the European Union – I'm personally a very strong believer in the European project. And I've dedicated my professional life to bring my country into the European Union.

The fact is that since several years the European Union has been busy with internal issues, migration crisis, before the financial crisis, now the Brexit crisis. And we sort of lost focus from the region of the western Balkans. And this resulted, I would say, in the less-enthusiastic approach to reforms. So what I experienced myself is that the region is moving in the right direction every time the European Union and the U.S. are working hand-in-hand, realizing and understanding that it should be the European Union that is the face, because it's the European Union that is offering the perspective.

So we need to keep the European perspective alive and, as I said, credible and tangible. What I see as – there are no unsolvable problems. The name issue for North Macedonia seemed unsolvable for 20-plus years, and yet it was done. And it took two leaders with vision, with courage, and they delivered. So what I see as most pertinent issues right now is the lack of progress in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. And I believe that we should focus more on it, and demand both partners to solve their open issues through this dialogue.

And then the functionality, or rather the lack of functionality, of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The good thing, as I said, is that these are not the problems that could result in conflicts. No, I mean, the region is past that stage. But people are losing faith. They are losing confidence in the future of their countries. The young generation is leaving these countries in huge numbers. And this is very bad. So therefore, we need to bring this trust back into these countries. We need to engage more with them.

WILSON: Thank you very much. And the OSCE plays an important role in negotiations to end conflicts, including the 2008 invasion of Georgia by Russian forces. What is the status of OSCE actions in Georgia? Again, a newly democratic country, a very dynamic country. I've had the opportunity to visit Georgia, and you can actually see the fences that the Russian Federation had placed as part of their occupation. And what is your role to try to mediate?

LAJCAK: I visited Georgia as part of my introductory visits. And of course, I've been in Georgia many times before, but this was first time in my capacity. I also went to visit the line of contact with the South Ossetia. And you see how much this really divides villages and how much it interferes with people's lives. And at that time, the crossing point were closed, so I used my coming visit to Moscow to urge the Russian side to use their influence to have these points reopened. The good thing is that the Georgian situation could be defined as protracted conflict

or frozen conflict, because people are not dying. Not on daily basis. So at the same time, it's been more than 10 years, and we would wish to see, of course a greater progress.

We have two mechanisms, Geneva International Dialogue and the IPRM, which is the incidents prevention and resolving mechanisms. So we need to invest into these – into these two mechanisms to keep them alive and to address the issues through these formats. So this is very important. And we need to be patient.

I obviously met my interlocutor's partners in Jordan government, and I appreciated the constructive approach that the government has taken adopting a strategy document that steps into the future which is trying to engage with citizens and being very generous with citizens of these two occupied territories, allowing for medical services and other services. And I think it's really very important that you keep the dialogue and keep the contact at the people's level while making sure that we are trying to address the political issues at a political level.

WILSON: Very important, thank you so much.

And my final question: In many ways the OSCE has been a pioneer in cybersecurity issues. In 2013 participating states agreed to the first-ever set of cybersecurity confidence-building measures. How does the chairmanship view the continued contributions of these confidence-building measures in a climate in which the state-directed cyberattacks appear to be increasing in frequency and severity?

LAJCAK: Cybersecurity is an issue that is influencing our daily lives, and we are paying attention to the cybersecurity within the OSCE as well. And I referred to a number of high-level conferences in my introductory remarks. We have already organized two, and the one in June will be dedicated to this issue of cybersecurity. And I am already trying to present this conference as a very special event because if the security in the 20th century was about protecting borders, about hard security, security in the 21st century is very much defined by the cyberspace. And we need to understand this new narrative of security, and we want to use this conference in June in Bratislava to offer this new perspective on security because, if we want to be able to counter the challenges that are coming from the cyberspace, we need to be able to define and to understand them. So I really hope – and I've already invited also the participants from the United States to come and share their experience and knowledge about cyberspace and cybersecurity.

WILSON: Thank you very much, and I look forward to working with the chairman in the future.

HASTINGS: All right, Senator, before you begin, let me introduce Commissioner Gwendolyn Moore, who has just joined us. She is from Wisconsin.

All right, Senator.

GARDNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your time here today before the Commission.

This morning Secretary General Stoltenberg talked about the conflict in Ukraine and the illegal annexation/invasion by Russia being the first action of forcefully taking of a country since World War II.

Looking back at the action in Ukraine in 2014, Georgia in 2008, but particularly Ukraine, what should the U.S. or OSCE have done differently in response? Your comment – we must make the people of Ukraine feel that we are with them, I think, is what you said. What should we have done differently in 2014 and after in Ukraine – U.S. and, in your opinion, OSCE?

LAJCAK: I don't think we have made any mistakes on the side of our organizations, but probably we did not react properly to 2008 in Georgia. And this was – well, there were some measures taken, but we were not really – we as an international community, not only OSCE, but also NATO and European Union – not really consistent with our reaction. And probably – well, if we had the chance to go back in time, probably that reaction should have been different back then to prevent future actions like this.

Second point is that – and I feel very strongly about it – that we really need to use the multilateral system that was created after the World War II for a real dialogue. It needed critical dialogue. We need to use these platforms to speak up, and to raise the right questions, and to demand answers because somehow, more and more, we are meeting in these formal meeting rooms to exchange monologues rather than to engage in real dialogue. And the dialogue is happening on the sidelines somehow in different formats.

But I – you know, before 2014 there were – and you know very well, Mr. Chairman – there were questions about the need for OSCE to continue existing, and there were different agendas – Corfu process and others, Helsinki plus 40 – and then the Ukrainian crisis came and all of a sudden everyone realized that there is no organization better suited to deal with it than the OSCE because you have the political level – the Permanent Council – and you have the presence on the ground. And OSCE has the primary mandate in dealing with the Ukrainian issue. We have 1,500-plus monitors in the Special Monitoring Mission, and every other organization – U.N., NATO, European Union – is relying on the facts found and delivered by the OSCE organization.

So therefore we really need to use the potential of international organizations. And every time we see signals – because these things do not happen out of the blue – but again, way too often – and I am now speaking not as the chairperson but as a professional diplomat of 30 years – we way too often tend to ignore the signals that something is going wrong and bad things are about to happen. And we only start acting after they have happened, so the prevention is extremely, extremely important. And I really believe that we can do a better job here in preventing conflict.

GARDNER: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HASTINGS: Senator.

Ms. Moore?

MOORE: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and excuse my tardiness. Lots of things happening, but I really wanted to be here.

So Mr. Chairman and members of the Helsinki Commission, and His Excellency, Mr. Chairperson of the OSCE, it's nice to see you again. I met you briefly in Germany, and I'm happy to be here today.

And I tell you that you leaned into one of my concerns that this is probably a really, really critical time in the OSCE organization and your chairmanship at this time. And I'm thinking – because one of our partners, the Russian Federation, certainly has violated all of the Helsinki principles as we have so carefully constructed them. These violations are things that we need to address, and I am concerned about the reputational risk to the OSCE unless we have a plan of action to deal with the Russian Federation.

Also, like – unless you've already done it – to sort of describe what your impressions were when you visited Ukraine in January. I thought that that was a great act of political courage on your part to really lean into one of the primary sorts of issues that we have, and I just want to get your feedback as to what you think the OSCE can do more to resolve the violations of the Russian Federation, and what you think the internal status is of the Ukrainians. Thank you.

LAJCAK: Thank you, Madam Commissioner. And obviously as the chairperson in office of the OSCE I'm not in a position to judge the participating states since I am speaking on behalf of the organization, but what I want to say is that OSCE is unique in many aspects, and one of the aspects is that OSCE is one of the few international bodies where United States and Russian Federation are sitting in the same room at the same table. There is no – there are not that many others; probably only the United Nations, which of course has 193 members. So therefore we have to use this fact to look eye-to-eye and to talk about issues, and to use this potential and this unique platform. This is what makes the OSCE unique.

And therefore, as I just spoke about, I really believe that there is a lot of potential of the OSCE that has not been used yet. And I am a strong believer in a dialogue, and I am absolutely certain that a critical dialogue is better than no dialogue at all. And talking to each other is better than talking about each other. And OSCE –

MOORE: I'll steal that one. (Laughter.)

LAJCAK: Please, feel free. (Laughs.)

And OSCE gives us this platform, so we'll have to use it to address these issues because it covers the huge territory from Vancouver to Vladivostok. There is so much things we can do, and we have to.

Way too often the work of the organization – and OSCE is not the only one – is blocked because of some issues not really related to the core business of the organizations. We still don't

have the agreed budget for this year because of unrelated issue, but it's already April and this is really limiting our activity. So this is one of the examples of how we need to use the potential of the organization.

The second part of your question about Ukraine, for us, the focus on people is very much our priority, and we want to show that there is a political level of processes that are different mechanisms, but there are people, and these people need to see that there is someone who cares about them. And being a politician myself, I know what lack of political will means. That means you don't want to agree; you don't want to reach a deal.

But when I was standing on that bridge, which is, as I said, the only crossing point in the Lugansk area – people have to travel more than 100 kilometers to get there, to wait in line to cross these two kilometers. Try to tell them that there is no political will and I wonder what their reaction would be. And these people are so – they are beyond frustration, they are not even frustrated. They like have given up. They don't trust anyone. So therefore we are trying to identify the issues how to help them. If we widen the de-mine zone around schools, the kindergartens, hospitals, nobody is losing. Everybody is winning, for example.

If you try to introduce the bus line so that the people will be able to travel also by bus or by train and not necessarily on foot, no one is losing. Everybody is winning. So this is what we are trying to do – not losing focus on the big picture but understanding that there are real people, and real destinies, and real lives beyond that. And if we will be able to help to ease the suffering of some of these people during our year, I will be very happy.

MOORE: His Excellency, I just wanted to commend you on your focus on youth. I think just – when you talked about prevention that is just – the quintessential strategy for preventing chaos is to deal with the youth.

Are there any particular initiatives that you can share with us that we ought to amplify through OSCE? I'm thinking when we go back for our July meeting we might be prepared to come up with some resolutions that address some of your priorities in that area.

LAJCAK: We want to make sure that youth is part of everything we do because we don't want to, like, organize one event dedicated to youth and then continue the business as usual. So we are reaching out to young people, and we want to hear their opinion, particularly in the third, the human dimension of our activities. So we want to make sure that they feel that OSCE is also their organization and they have their say in everything that OSCE is doing.

MOORE: Thank you.

I yield back to you, Mr. Chairman.

HASTINGS: I would like to piggyback on Ms. Moore's comment in that regard and to emphasize the fact that in cybersecurity, young people know a hell of a lot more about what's going on than we do. And if you don't think that's true, ask your eight-year-old. Just let he or she pick up your cell phone and see what they do with it that you don't know how to do.

And that's true of all of us in each of the dimensions. So the earlier that we turn to some particular program that allows for youth to have some advantages that we as adults don't share at that moment, the better off we will be, particularly in the area of cybersecurity. And I mean that most sincerely.

You don't need to be introduced to a friend. Senator Roger Wicker is here, and you know him extremely well.

WICKER: Well, thank you very much, and I appreciate my two House colleagues, who are usually under the five-minute rule, for filibustering long enough to keep this hearing going – (laughter) – so I could get down here. I'm sorry I'm late, and I'm sorry I've missed a good bit of it.

But Mr. Minister, we are thrilled to see you, and my goodness, it's great to be back with my friend of longstanding and colleague, Alcee Hastings, and to see you looking so good, Alcee.

HASTINGS: Yeah, I'm holding on. I'm fighting.

WICKER: I'll tell you, it's just wonderful. It's wonderful.

And we've worked on a bipartisan basis, bicameral basis to make the strong statement that the Helsinki Commission is relevant to so much that is going on these days; that our participation in the OSCE parliamentary assembly is absolutely pertinent to so many issues.

My colleagues and I were at a joint meeting of Congress earlier today with the Secretary General of NATO, where there is quite a bit of overlap, and I think – I think we're making a statement and it continues this afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Ms. Moore, in this hearing today from the chair in office. And we're delighted at Slovakia's chairmanship this year, and thrilled to have our friend, Miroslav Lajcak, with us.

For more than 40 years the OSCE has worked to bolster security, democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Certainly – I don't know if Senator Cardin has been able to touch base today, but he and I, along with other members of the Helsinki Commission, introduced a resolution in 2017 to recognize the importance of the Helsinki Final Act and the OSCE, as well as their relevance to American national security. And I can tell you, Mr. Chairman, when you ask the generals who have jurisdiction in Europe what they think of OSCE, they say it's a valuable tool, not only to get the parliaments together, but also to provide information sometimes that we're not able to get from any other source in Europe.

We're a 57-member organization that operates – has to operate by consensus, and certainly we've had our challenges. Unfortunately, as the secretary general of NATO pointed out today, Russia has tried in many ways to abuse its power in OSCE to block consensus and use the power of the purse to paralyze our mission.

We hope that improves. I'd like to see the day when there is not this conflict within our Parliamentary Assembly with our Russian membership. But Russia has attempted to redefine European borders – let's just face it, it's a fact – through force, so countering the Russian Federation's clear, gross, uncorrected violations of all ten OSCE core principles should be among the highest priorities for any OSCE chairmanship.

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate the fact that you visited Ukraine in January. I understand there has been some Q&A in that regard. I'm also heartened that someone with a deep understanding of the Balkans is engaged at this critical time.

I had the opportunity to lead in July a nine-member, bicameral, bipartisan delegation to Bosnia. I believe Ms. Moore was with us on that occasion. Our trip included trips of course to the federation part but also to Republika Srpska, and it was an eye opener, I can tell you.

I remain deeply concerned about the region as a whole, and perhaps we can hear you elaborate on your views as how we might strengthen the process of democratic reform, fight against corruption, and fight against regional instability. We stopped a bloody conflagration there over a decade – over two decades ago, but I'm afraid we're frozen right now, and I'm deeply concerned and heartbroken that the people of the Balkans are not well served some decades after NATO and the United States and others came in and helped stabilize the situation.

Finally, we're honored to have you here today, Mr. Minister, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the founding of NATO and 15 years after Slovakia joined this essential transatlantic alliance. It was great to see Secretary Pompeo visit Slovakia in February. As he said as he stood before Slovakia's Gate of Freedom memorial, remembering the more than 400 innocents who lost their lives attempting to flee communism: We stand in unity with the people of Slovakia and Europe in recommitting to a future that is more prosperous, secure and, most of all, free.

So just to echo the kind words of support that I know have already been expressed today, I wish you every success. Thank you much for being here, and if there is anything you would like to add based on my comments, I would certainly be glad to hear them, although I don't wish to prolong the event for those who have been here for quite some time.

HASTINGS: Actually, I was going to ask the minister if he had a minute more for one or two more questions.

LAJCAK: Yes, of course. I am at your disposal.

HASTINGS: Please respond.

LAJCAK: I am not coming here that often, so of course I –

WICKER: Did I say anything that requires a response or elaboration, Mr. Minister?

LAJCAK: Not an elaboration, but I would like to react to a couple of statements you made, sir. First, have no doubts about the relevance of this Helsinki Commission. I mean, it's – the relevance is huge. It has had – I mean, a very strong impact on the transition process in my own country. There are many politicians in my country who are scared when they hear about Helsinki Commission – (laughs) – and rightly so, and you have been very strict in insisting on the basic principles of the Helsinki document and respect for the rule of law, and human rights, and non-discrimination. So my wish for you is to continue doing what you have been doing so successfully because you have been instrumental in bringing about changes in our part of the world.

And OSCE – as I said, it's a very unique organization because – and I've seen it, again, during my years in the Balkans – is seen as a partner thanks to the presence on the ground, living side by side with people, sharing their daily concerns, assisting them with practical issues – access to water, electricity, basic services. People trust OSCE, and it's really about the organization, about the OSCE, how we can turn this trust and the knowledge from the ground into political action. And here, of course, we could wish for a better result because somehow we are not always processing the information in the best interest of people we are supposed to serve here. So this is the challenge for all of us.

And for the Western Balkans, I've already elaborated and I don't want to repeat myself because there was a question before. I am more optimistic. I really believe that the region is irreversibly on a positive trajectory. The process has slowed down lately because the attention from European capitals and from Brussels has been weakened, and this is an interaction of two partners. So very briefly, what I want to see is European standards; I mean, insisting on the countries bringing – introducing European standards in every aspect of their lives and the functioning of their societies. It will not come if they don't believe in the European perspective, and this is something the European Union should guarantee for them. And second, to give young people trust in the future – in their future lives in their countries so they don't have to think about leaving their countries and looking for opportunity somewhere else. And this is an issue that is very much present in the region.

But they are both doable, and there is also an understanding in the international organization that this needs to be done. I will visit the region – now in my capacity of the chairperson in office – all the countries because OSCE is present in each and every one of them to try to address the issues on the ground, talking to people including the young generation and civil society actors.

In Slovakia, civil society is very active, very dynamic, very influential, and this has been instrumental in a successful transformation of our country. So we know what civil society means and therefore we are very much in favor of working with civil society in other countries and encouraging civil societies to play their role because they are, I would say, the critical voice, the watchdogs. They are making sure that politicians know that they are under public scrutiny. And that's extremely important for every sound democratic society.

HASTINGS: Ms. Moore, you had something you wished to add.

MOORE: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your indulgence.

I just wanted to commemorate the second anniversary of the death of someone who originates and emanates from my district in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and that's Joseph Stone. Joseph Stone was a medic, a contractor for the OSCE who was killed in April of 2017. I just wanted to mention for the record that, while OSCE is not a peacekeeping force, it's not an army – that many of our members, in their efforts to humanitarian missions, put their lives in danger for the common good and for our purposes, and I just wanted to remember Joseph Stone.

And Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for your indulgence. And please let the record reflect that we mentioned this.

HASTINGS: It shall without question. And the SMM mission speaks for itself, and hopefully we can enlarge it. It is particularly critical that we have on-the-ground forces, and Mr. Stone is thanked – his family for his bravery and his contribution with his life to better the concerns for all of us.

Mr. Minister, we didn't get to tolerance and discrimination. We didn't get to Central Asia. We didn't get to counterterrorism. We didn't get to beneficial ownership registries which my country is dealing with at this point. And certainly we didn't spend as much time as we would like on economic and environmental dimension.

But the fact of the matter is that we covered a lot of ground, and you were very clear. And I deeply appreciate it.

One thing I would say to my colleagues – and I say it them often – is that if we travel more – meaning members of the Helsinki Commission – it helps even if we – with limited time on the ground. And Senator Wicker has seen fit that we do that as often as we can as a collaborative on the CODELS [Congressional Delegations], but I encourage, even when it is not our CODEL, if it's a Helsinki Commission on somebody else's CODEL, and they raise the issues that are pertinent to the OSCE, that it always is helpful.

And I'll leave you with this and how important it is that you visit. Karimov, before his death – I consider myself to have become a friend of his. And the reason for that is – again, a little more bragging – I'm the only individual that I know in the United States Congress that spent a week in Uzbekistan. But in addition to having spent a week there, I visited there five different times. So I went there with a group whose name will be not mentioned, and he treated us royally, he really did. And as we were about to leave, one of them asked, you've been so nice to us. What could we do to help you? He said, you could do like Mr. Hastings. You could come here more, OK?

So I think if more of us in the American Congress were to travel about the world more rather than what I've seen in the last decade – us tending to listen to our media who tells us that if we travel we're not doing the business of our colleagues.

You know, I wanted to share with you the plight that we all have of young people leaving for greener pastures. Senator Wicker and Ms. Moore, and myself, and Joe Wilson – not so much Cory Gardner who was here earlier – I don't think he has the kind of rural areas that Senator Wicker, and Ms. Moore and I, and Wilson have. And believe it or not, we're having that exact same issue in our respective jurisdictions and constituencies where they are seeking greener pastures.

Somewhere along the line we have to, through multilateralism, find green enough pastures for all of these children to land in safe spaces.

Thank you so very much, Mr. Minister. This hearing is adjourned.

LAJCAK: Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 4:54 p.m., the hearing ended.]