



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin

Member - Helsinki Commission

Mr. Chairman, I join you in welcoming Foreign Minister Solomon Passy, whom I commend for his leadership as Chair-in-Office of the OSCE as well as for his leadership in promoting Bulgaria's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community.

Minister Passy has outlined a realistic agenda for this year focusing on the practical implementation of key strategies agreed at the Maastricht Ministerial to address conflicts, enhance practical security and promote tolerance.

I particularly appreciate the support given by the Bulgarian Government to our efforts to move the OSCE and its member participating States to respond to the rise in anti-Semitic violence that spiked some 18 months ago. The Berlin Conference on anti-Semitism is being held under the auspices of the Bulgarian Chair-in-Office, and I am very much looking forward to this important meeting it will building on the work undertaken last year at last year's meeting on anti-Semitism in Vienna, which Minister Passy personally attended.

In advance of the Berlin meeting, the United States has urged all participating States to fulfill the Maastricht Ministerial Council decision, and forward to the OSCE's Office on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights information on existing legislation regarding crimes fuelled by intolerance and discrimination, as well as statistical information on these crimes. It is important that the participating States transmit this information to ODIHR as soon as possible, so that it can inform our discussion at the Berlin meeting in April. I hope the Bulgarian Government will lead by example in this regard.

Along similar lines, I look forward to active engagement at the Brussels meeting on Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination in September. Violent attacks against Roma and other minorities and widespread discrimination against them underscores the need for continued vigilance in this area.

I also hope that the parliament will consider amending the problematic Law on Religions, as key provisions are out of step with OSCE norms.

As the chief sponsor of two OSCE Parliamentary Assembly resolutions on the North Caucasus, I have followed the issue of Chechnya closely. We were disappointed when the Russian delegation withheld consensus on the mission mandate at the end of 2002. We've read reports of your recent meeting in Moscow with Foreign Minister Ivanov, and look forward

to any thoughts you may wish to share on a renewed role for OSCE in Chechnya.

As Chair of the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment, I am pleased that the OSCE Ministerial Council, during its meeting in Maastricht last December, adopted a Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension, the first major elaboration of OSCE economic goals and activities since the 1990 Bonn Document. This well thought out document provides a solid basis for the work of our Committee, and I look forward to working with you to enhance this important dimension of the OSCE. I believe that it is vital that the OSCE build institutional and human capacity and the rule of law in order to strengthen the economies and societies of the participating States, and to stimulate both domestic and foreign investment.

Mr. Minister, I wish you success in your challenging work this year to strengthen the security, economic, and human dimensions of the OSCE.