

As Co-Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I welcome today's public briefing featuring Alexandr Nikitin. Mr. Nikitin's saga began nearly five years ago when he co-authored a report exposing the environmental hazards of Russia's deteriorating nuclear fleet. Having endured nearly a year in solitary confinement, Nikitin stood accused of high treason and espionage in a case doggedly pursued for more than four years by the Russian Federal Security. His plight received considerable attention last year when the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly met in St. Petersburg, where Mr. Nikitin resides. I supported the resolution adopted by the Assembly that highlighted the unjust nature of the proceedings against him which violated several provisions in the Russian Constitution as well as the European Convention on Human Rights.

Following years of harassment by the authorities, last December, Mr. Nikitin was formally acquitted by the St. Petersburg City Court of any wrongdoing. His acquittal was upheld by the Moscow-based Supreme Court in April of this year. While it appeared that Mr. Nikitin's legal ordeal had come to a close, in a disturbing development we learned yesterday that the Russian Prosecutor General's office has apparently decided to appeal the decision of the three-judge Supreme Court panel to the entire court. The Commission will closely monitor these developments and we certainly will continue to press to see that justice ultimately will prevail in this case.

I urge all participating States to fully respect the right of individuals, such as Mr. Nikitin, concerned with environmental issues to express freely their views, to associate with others, and to obtain, publish and distribute information on these issues as called for in the Sofia OSCE Document on the Protection of the Environment.