



## HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

# Testimony :: Hon. Christopher H. Smith

Chairman - Helsinki Commission

This morning we warmly welcome the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, His Excellency Solomon Passy. Minister Passy has had a long and varied career, including as an academic, parliamentarian and president of Bulgaria's largest non-governmental organization – the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria. Since the fall of communism, he has been one of the leading proponents of Bulgaria's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. This has special significance with Bulgaria's impending NATO membership. With Bulgaria now leading the OSCE, we welcome Mr. Passy as the Chairman-in-Office.

I am very pleased that, in outlining your program for 2004, you stressed that implementation of OSCE commitments will top your agenda. Indeed, implementation of freely-undertaken commitments by all 55 participating States is central to fostering cooperation, democratic transformation and respect for human rights and the rule of law in the OSCE region, thereby contributing significantly to Euro-Atlantic stability and security. OSCE's core mission is to help ensure implementation.

We continue to face many challenges in the OSCE region. Even a short list would include the endless agony of war-torn Chechnya, the extremely difficult negotiations in Transdnistria, the upcoming elections in Ukraine, the crackdown in Azerbaijan following rigged elections, the fledgling democracy in Georgia, the dismal human rights situation in Belarus and Uzbekistan, the entrenchment of a bizarre dictatorship in Turkmenistan, human trafficking, corruption that undermines the rule of law, and violent intolerance that tears at the fabric of our societies.

I hope the Bulgarian Chairmanship will maintain support for the OSCE's efforts to combat trafficking in persons. Having been appointed last week at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Winter Meeting as the Assembly's first Special Representative to Combat Trafficking, I will encourage the legislatures in the region to revamp laws wherever needed to provide the tools necessary for combating this slavery. In conjunction with strong leadership on this issue from the Chairman-in-Office, I believe we are poised to make substantial progress in thwarting this evil trade.

In the spring of 2002, Europe witnessed a spike in anti-Semitic violence not seen in decades. Members of the Helsinki Commission have since actively engaged in the fight against anti-Semitism in the OSCE region, urging our fellow parliamentarians and governmental leaders to take action. There appears to be a gradual diminution of violent acts, although sporadic episodes continue to arise throughout the region. I was pleased that the Maastricht

Ministerial Council took a strong position on this, with foreign ministers again denouncing anti-Semitism and intolerance, and approving a follow-up conference on anti-Semitism and a follow-up conference on racism, xenophobia and discrimination. These evils are worthy of more attention, and I appreciate Bulgaria's leadership in supporting and facilitating these two events.

We look to Bulgaria to play a helpful role in fostering implementation of the newly adopted Action Plan on Roma and Sinti. Two years ago, we were fortunate to have Bulgarian Ambassador Poptodorova participate in a hearing on Romani human rights issues. We invited her contribution in light of Bulgaria's positive efforts to integrate its Romani minority in the field of education. Just a few months ago, Bulgaria adopted comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, consistent with the Istanbul Summit Declaration. But, much remains to be done to improve the situation for Roma in the OSCE region. I am alarmed by reports this week of violent clashes between Roma and police in Slovakia and will continue to monitor developments there.

As you know, we've had the Chairmen-in-Office testify for the last three years – Foreign Ministers of Romania, Portugal, and The Netherlands. Your appearance is unique in that you are appearing before the Commission early in your tenure as Chairman.

The responsibilities of leading the OSCE will be challenging, yet this is also an exciting time for your country. I have followed Bulgaria's remarkable transition since the fall of communism and am very pleased at Bulgaria's progress as a democratic country about to become a full-fledged member of NATO. Unthinkable fifteen years ago, I know you have worked hard to achieve these reforms. We salute Bulgaria's firm cooperation in the war on terrorism and in building a more secure, peaceful and democratic world. You bring a unique perspective to the Chairmanship, coming from a country that has come a long way in such a short time in its democratic transformation. At the same time, we recognize the challenges that Bulgaria still faces – in tackling corruption and organized crime, and ensuring the rights of Roma and other minorities, and promoting religious liberty.

Mr. Minister, we wish you success in the months ahead in your efforts to strengthen the OSCE process. Thank you for your leadership and I look forward to your testimony.

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It is with deep sadness that I open today's hearing by noting the sudden death of Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski in a plane crash in southern Bosnia. Trajkovski served – and represented – his country well as President since 1999, which included some difficult years for Macedonia. Among other things, he was credited with helping to stop an internal, ethnic conflict in Macedonia and put the country back on the path of reconciliation. The President was stopping to attend a conference in Mostar en route to Dublin to submit Macedonia's application eventually to join the European Union.

Many know that his background as a Methodist minister made him unique in a region which places such an emphasis on cultural traditions. Many European leaders have already issued praise for his passion and friendship.

I am sure our featured witness this morning, Foreign Minister Passy of neighboring Bulgaria, knew of President Trajkovski's accomplishments.

On behalf of the entire Helsinki Commission, let me express our condolences to Boris Trajkovski's family and friends. To the people of Macedonia, let me add that your country just lost a great leader, but I encourage you to take pride in what he did for Macedonia and the region as you work toward the brighter future he was seeking. I am confident you can rely upon the United States for support to this end.