



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE  
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)**

**Hearing on**

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

Tuesday, March 1, 2016

2:00 PM

Room 334 Cannon House Office Building

**Opening Statement by the Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin, Commissioner**

Minister Steinmeier, thank you for participating in this important dialogue about Europe’s largest comprehensive security organization. I know that for Germany, the OSCE has particular historic significance in that it played a role in the unification of Germany. I welcome Germany’s leadership of the OSCE and your appreciation for the potential of the OSCE as a forum to bridging seemingly unbridgeable divides.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has been at the center of the OSCE’s focus for two years now. I welcome your strong commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and look forward to hearing your views on this singular challenge within the OSCE region and especially your assessment of efforts to reach a solution that would restore Ukraine’s full control over its own territory.

While the conflict in Ukraine and the defense of the Helsinki Final Act Decalogue must understandably be our collective priority, there are no shortage of profound concerns that will require your attention and stewardship this year.

Moldova has the potential to be a prosperous, democratic European country. But it is ultimately up to Moldova to fulfill that goal. Moldova’s friends can and should lend a hand. At the same time, Moldova’s sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected by all countries.

Democracies require a high level of trust in the institutions that are their foundations. Corruption undermines that trust, and thus undermines the very foundation of democracies. There is a clear correlation between failed states and endemic corruption. It is critical that the OSCE continue its work to build safeguards against corruption and support good governance throughout the OSCE region.

Belarus has worked to use its geopolitical position in the context of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to deflect attention from its own dismal human rights record. While I welcome the release of six individuals last October who had been imprisoned in violation of Principle VII of the Helsinki Final Act, much more should be done before parliamentary elections later this year -- including expunging the criminal record of all former political prisoners, ceasing persecution and harassment of journalists and opposition activists, and undertaking concrete steps to ensure that the parliamentary elections meet OSCE standards, such as a level playing field for all candidates, representation by all candidates on election commissions at all levels, and an honest and transparent vote counting process.

I am concerned by the escalation of human rights violations in Azerbaijan and elsewhere in central Asia over the past year, including politically motivated charges against members of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and the subsequent arrest of lawyers attempting to defend the IRPT members. Serious and widespread human rights violations have the potential to undermine peace and security in a country that has so recently suffered from civil war.

Mr. Minister, the OSCE has made enormous contributions to peace in the Balkans in the twenty years since the Dayton Accords. I believe some of the OSCE's greatest accomplishments are in this region. But in some countries, democratic institutions remain fragile, corruption is endemic, and ethnic divisions persist. I urge you to ensure that the OSCE maintains its robust engagement in the Balkans.

I welcome Germany's leadership in addressing tolerance and non-discrimination issues at this critical time in the region. In my capacity as the OSCE PA Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism, and Intolerance, I am currently focusing my efforts on addressing prejudice and violence impacting Jewish, Muslim, and migrant communities, and the enduring problem of discriminatory policing.

I look forward to partnering with the Chair on your new initiative to combat anti-Semitism in the wake of the tragedies in Paris and Copenhagen, and ongoing security concerns for the Jewish community.

As I noted in our recent hearing with ODIHR Director Michael Link -- racism and anti-Muslim bigotry have been key obstacles to moving policy making beyond border security to long-term humanitarian integration and resettlement efforts for refugees and migrants in the OSCE region. I have long called for an OSCE Conference and Action Plan on combating racism and xenophobia in the region that includes a focus on racial and religious profiling by law enforcement -- noting its disproportionate impact on African descent, Muslim, Roma, and migrant communities. I hope these are efforts we can work on together as the Chairmanship drafts plans for its series of Tolerance meetings this year.

As someone who had long encouraged Germany to address the genocide of Roma, I was deeply heartened by Chancellor Merkel's participation in the 2012 unveiling of a memorial for the Roma and Sinti victims of National Socialism. In the humanitarian spirit of diversity and inclusion in which Germany is currently welcoming new arrivals, I hope you will ensure that Roma and other diverse communities are included in the work of the OSCE -- as members of OSCE missions and staff, as interlocutors, and as partners.

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