

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

**“The Power and Purpose of Parliamentary Diplomacy: Inter-Parliamentary  
Initiatives and the U.S. Contribution”**

**Committee Members Present:**

**Representative Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL), Chairman;  
Senator Roger F. Wicker (R-MS), Co-Chairman;  
Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member;  
Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), Ranking Member**

**Other Members Present:**

**Representative Filemon Vela (D-TX)**

**Witnesses:**

**George Tsereteli, Member of the Parliament of the Republic of Georgia,  
President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly;  
Attila Mesterházy, Member of the Parliament of Hungary,  
President (Acting) of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly**

**The Hearing Was Held From 9:39 a.m. To 11:28 a.m. in Room 210, Cannon  
House Office Building, Washington, D.C., Representative Alcee L. Hastings  
(D-FL), Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe,  
presiding**

**Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2020**

HASTINGS: (Sounds gavel.) All right. Good morning. We'll come to order. And thank you all for being here. My name is Alcee Hastings and I'm chair of this committee. And the Honorable Roger Wicker is my companion in that regard. He's co-chair. And the other members that are with us are Congressman Vela and the vice chair of the Helsinki Commission, my good friend Joe Wilson. Who, I might add, I have some pictures that Joe took, and I didn't bring them with me, but I'll see to it that you get them, OK?

The conduct of foreign relations is the well-known responsibility of foreign ministries and the diplomats who represent their countries in embassies and at the international organizations around the globe. Among them often are some of the best and brightest a country has to offer. And they often must work under difficult and sometimes dangerous conditions. Their dedication to public service is to be commended, particularly at this time. I would add, however, that the executive branch of government and the diplomats working within it do not have a monopoly on diplomatic activity, particularly in democracies. The legislative branch plays a role. Members of Congress here and parliamentarians elsewhere ensure that foreign policy reflects the will and interests of the people.

Like all government policy should, when parliamentarians travel to other countries, they can also reinforce ongoing diplomatic efforts and indicate the level of support for particular efforts and concerns. Some professional diplomats may not always appreciate me, as an elected official, like I may appreciate them as a public servant. But many, if not most, diplomats value parliamentary engagement as enhancing their own efforts. Parliamentary engagement applies as much to multilateral diplomacy as it does to bilateral diplomacy. And today's hearing looks at the efforts of two very effective interparliamentary fora, the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO.

Both are independent of, yet closely tied, to international organizations vital to the preservation of peace and stability across Europe, and into neighboring regions and, to some extent, around the globe. By engaging each other to exchange views and share expertise on the challenges that appear on the international stage, parliamentarians from the national parliaments of participating or member states can help steer and coordinate responses to those challenges and better hold their governments accountable for the appropriate conduct of bilateral and multilateral relationships.

This hearing will examine the concept of parliamentary diplomacy, review the activities of both the OSCE PA and NATO PA, and assess the ways in which they parallel and support the multilateral diplomatic efforts of governments to follow shared principles and reach common goals. The hearing will also allow discussion of the many current challenges facing the NATO alliance and the OSCE region, the role played by the United States Congress, and possibilities for similar parliamentary initiatives in other regions on the world.

We're pleased to have representation and presentations by the president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, my dear and good friend George Tsereteli of Georgia, and of the

NATO PA, Atilla Mesterházy of Hungary. Their biographies have been made available. Before their presentations, I'd first call on my colleagues who may have opening remarks.

But let me conclude my opening statement with a comment on the United States contribution. I attended my initial Parliamentary Assembly meeting in 1996. And I'm preparing to attend my 39th meeting later this month, along with my colleagues, as the head of the U.S. delegation.

One little quick story, that first meeting that I attended was in Poland. And we went, several of us, on a day trip to Auschwitz. And while I was in Auschwitz, Steny Hoyer, who is the majority leader here in the House of Representatives, and a man named Bill Graham from Canada put my name and nomination to be a rapporteur. Hell, I couldn't spell rapporteur. You know, and so I got back that night and it was the first time – George, I don't know whether you've seen it since – it was the first time that they had your hands held up. And I actually beat the president of Georgia and a Dutch person. He wasn't president then. But I'm saying to myself – and when I got back from Auschwitz, I'm looking for these people and I can't find them. And they put my name in nomination without asking me anything. The rest is history.

For more than a decade, I not only attended meetings but represented the OSCE PA as one of its officers, including two years as president. That translates into a lot of trips across the Atlantic, and some across the Pacific, not to relax but to work over weekends and frequently over federal holidays. This added work is not a required part of my job as a member of the House of Representatives, but something that I felt was nevertheless my responsibility to do. While undertaking this work, I've spent considerable time with colleagues, Democrat and Republican, House and Senate, with whom I might not otherwise have become acquainted or developed relationships, which we then used for getting things done when we returned to Washington.

I think the members present, but also for the hundreds of members of Congress who attended OSCE PA and NATO gatherings over the decades, would agree that we have defended and advanced the interests of the United States of America through our contribution to security and cooperation in Europe and around the world. And while perhaps difficult to document, I'm confident we've done, so far, at far less cost than our country might have paid if we had just stayed home.

Finally, let me express my gratitude not only to the staff of the Helsinki Commission and the secretariat of the NATO and OSCE Parliamentary Assemblies for making our work in parliamentary diplomacy possible. Many of them are here today. One who is not here, but may be watching, he's always everywhere, is Spencer Oliver. The first chief of staff at the commission and the first secretary general of the OSCE. His persistence in overcoming obstacles to parliamentarians in doing the work has helped bring us to where we are today. And I hope he recognizes that we're still carrying so much of the work that he started.

George, I turned the page and I do have the picture of you and Roberto. So I'll give it to you. And Joe took this picture. It's absolutely fabulous. The senator – yeah, the senator is on there as well. And I'll now turn the microphone over to Senator Wicker for any remarks he may wish to make.

WICKER: Well, thank you, Chairman Hastings. And I just checked, and you spell rapporteur with two Ps. (Laughter.) I have to preside over a hearing in the Hart Building at 10:00 a.m. So I'm going to make my brief statement, and then make a hasting troop over to the other side. But I do appreciate the opportunity to be here, great to see good friends back. And let me just say that I believe strong diplomatic engagements with the OSCE make the world and the United States safer. We have the strength of our democratic institutions at the Helsinki principles of the Western alliance to our advantage. Legislative dialogue reveals like-minded partners who share our interests and concerns. The OSCE is just one forum where the United States helps to lead the world forward on diverse issues ranging from collective security to human rights.

This hearing is being held to discuss the special role and impact of parliamentary diplomacy. And I think you hit it right on the head with your statement, Mr. Chairman. And I congratulate you for that. In any Parliamentary Assembly the people are represented, not just the governing political parties. Even in our own delegation to the OSCE, our members of Congress are free to agree and disagree and to vote one way or another, that may or may not conform with the policies of our government. We may be the most independent parliamentarians anywhere, but when we come together in a bipartisan way to defend core U.S. interests, we show the true depth of this country's commitment to security and cooperation in Europe, both in NATO and in the OSCE.

Since 2009, I've been involved in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, where I currently serve as vice president. The U.S. presence in the OSCE and NATO Parliamentary Assemblies is even more important given the challenges we face today in the regions they cover. We need a strong response to Russia's aggression against its neighbors, particularly in Ukraine, and their threats further afield. The Russian delegation is usually fully present in our meetings. We need to be there as well, to hold them accountable and also to find common ground where it exists, on issues such as trafficking or terrorism.

Of course, Europe is not the only region in the world where parliamentary diplomacy is needed. Senator Cardin and I have a bill, S.1310, the Organization of American States legislative engagement in 2019. It recently passed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and I hope it will advance through the Senate and the House in coming months. We believe regular meetings of parliamentarians from Latin America can only help build upon the success of the OAS as an institution and help the fight against corruption. And certainly the president of the United States highlighted the importance of Latin America in his State of the Union address last night.

President Tsereteli, it's good to see you here today. You've been a good friend and a great leader of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I particularly want to thank you for the initiative to look at how the Kremlin has handled the investigation of the murder of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov. President Mesterházy, it's good to see you here as well. I remain a strong supporter of NATO, and that is bipartisan in this Congress. Acting not only as an alliance to deter war in Europe, but also to help restore and secure peace, as it has done in the

Balkans and elsewhere. I look forward to learning more about the NATO PA and its work and accomplishments.

Let me also welcome the secretaries general of the OSCE and NATO Parliamentary Assemblies here today. Roberto Montella and his international team have done an excellent job in Copenhagen. And I congratulate Ruxandra Popa of becoming the new secretary general of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Brussels. We rely on your help, and professionalism, and guidance. And your work is deeply appreciated. And so thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I take my leave and go to chair another hearing. Thank you, sir.

HASTINGS: All right. (Off mic.) With that in mind, Congressman Wilson, I – (off mic) – remarks you wish to make may be offered at this time.

WILSON: Well, Mr. Chairman and Senator Wicker, again, it's an honor to be here and to serve as the vice chair with Chairman Hastings. And we just appreciate your leadership. The OSCE, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly are just critical to have countries working together and working together for communications – to keep lines if communications open, even with countries that may not be open and favorable. So thank you so much for your success.

VELA: Happy to participate in this hearing today. I as well have a hearing I have to go to at 10:00. But it's a pleasure being here to listen to both of you. We look forward to visiting Georgia in May, after the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Ukraine. And, you know, I should say I just spent last weekend celebrating our own democracy, sort of, in Iowa. And you should know that I got to know a gentleman who immigrated from Hungary in 1956 because one of our candidates was basing their operation out of Jenó's Hungarian bar and restaurant in Davenport, Iowa. But it's a pleasure to have you both.

HASTINGS: Thank you so very much. And let's begin with the testimony of Mr. Tsereteli.

TSERETELI: Thank you, Mr. Chair, dear Alcee, for your very insightful introduction. And all commissioners for having us today. We understand that it's a very important and interesting time. Somehow it's a historical day today. And it's really pleasure for me to be here. The commissioners and also our guests, it's important to come have this meeting. And we're thankful on behalf of Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE.

Before I begin my testimony, I would like to also salute my co-panelist Mr. Mesterházy, and wish him success at the helm of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Likewise, I would like to congratulate Ms. Popa for recently taking over as secretary general of the NATO PA. And of course, to thank our Secretary General Roberto Montella and our team. Thank you very much of praising them. They deserve it. And also, being – thank you for being with us today.

I'm very much thankful for the leadership and active engagement of U.S. members of Congress and U.S. Helsinki Commission staff in our activities. This includes frequent discussions and adoption of resolutions on affairs related to the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, fact-finding field visits, reports by special representatives, all the

observation of elections throughout the OSCE area. I'm grateful for today's opportunity to shed some light on the precious work of parliamentary diplomacy for the global public.

Let me note also that through its strong engagement in western Balkans, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Caucasus – which myself know, because it's my own region – and Central Asia to this Congress itself is a very good example of the influence that parliamentary diplomacy can wield. While I could easily claim that all this work holds value for parliamentarians themselves, as well as for foreign experts and diplomats, we should always consider how this may be perceived by average citizen. One can see us traveling the globe to participate and speak – participate in conferences, different conferences and seminars, but does this have a concrete impact on daily lives of our citizens? Does it reduce their tax bill? Does it improve their well-being? Does it contribute to answering their most pressing security concerns.

Some might think this is sometimes a waste of time and money. Others could be skeptical about the outcome of these activities. Bearing this in mind, I will attempt to capture what I believe in this intrinsic value for international engagement. First, I would argue that one of our main advantages is our ability to open public discussions for which others are either not yet prepared for or not allowed to make. Our unique position gives us more flexible methods than diplomats, combined with greater authority to influence the political discourse. We benefit from excellent access to high-level interlocutors, and this is a considerable advantage to push our agenda. Our source of public statements has proven to be a critical tool in maintaining the credibility of the international community.

In the case of the conflict in Ukraine, for example, Moscow's veto powers have largely prevented the international community from acting decisively. To this day, the decision-making bodies and executive structures of the OSCE remain, of course, to be extremely cautious when addressing this issue. In contrast, our Parliamentary Assembly has condemned every year since 2014 the clear gross and uncorrected violations of the Helsinki principles by the Russian Federation, following a resolution sponsored by Senator Ben Cardin.

Likewise, we have repeatedly called for the full implementation by Russia of the 12th August 2008 ceasefire agreement and the withdrawal of the Russian military forces from Georgia's occupied region. We have also deployed the intentional suspension of OSCE field presences in the South Caucasus, where there are most need – the most need. Since our annual declarations sort of present the collective voice of parliaments of the OSCE participating states are voted after being drafted, amended, and thoroughly debated, this has put the OSCE on the record and contributing to upholding our moral compass.

Secondly, we find that parliamentary dialogue is a crucial role – a crucial tool to facilitate conflict resolution. Parliamentarians from confronting sides can establish long-term relations, build on trust through their work in inter-parliamentary bodies. It is with a goal in mind that we organize an annual retreat with the German Bundestag in first edition of the so-called – (inaudible) – seminars to facilitate one of the few direct meetings between Russian and Ukrainian parliamentarians since the start of the Ukrainian crisis. Past experiences have shown that we can create additional communication channels in times of crisis and in times of

negotiations. While we can be useful in this field, we must ensure that we do not undermine official processes.

Thirdly, and related to these considerations, our fact-finding missions have contributed to identifying and addressing pressing issues in affected areas. Our human rights committee has been active at assessing the living conditions along the contact line in eastern Ukraine and issuing recommendations to alleviating the suffering of civilian populations. Our frequent visits have advanced developments and facilitated developments, such as repair of the repair of the Stanytsia Luhanska Bridge, the creation of these engagement areas, and exchange of prisoners. And those efforts kept these issues high on the agenda of the international community.

You will find that parliamentarians can also open doors beyond conflict zones, because we are often accepted as legitimate interlocutors both by state authorities and by civil society. We have been able to hold discussions with opposition politicians and debate the state of human rights, for instance in Belarus during our annual session in Minsk. More recently, we have offered our good offices to promote depolarization in Albania. And this was possible even though some international organizations in Albania, including OSCE field office, have been quite openly criticized by major domestic stakeholders.

It is with this capability in mind that I have tasked one of the – one of our vice presidents, Ms. Margareta Cederfelt, to carry out a report on the investigation of the assassination of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov upon the request of Russian civil society representatives and based on a call by our assembly. And I'm thankful to the commissioners for having pushed for the adoption of a very strong resolution in both chambers of this topic, where the work of our Parliamentary Assembly is clearly underlined and supported. While this assessment has been hampered by lack of cooperation from the Russian authorities, I look forward to continuing our close collaboration with the U.S. Helsinki Commission to raise this issue in our assembly.

In a similar way, the work of our committees and special representatives helps advance parliamentary contributions to specific issues. I take this opportunity to underline the excellent work that has been conducted on human trafficking issues by Congressman Chris Smith and highlight authority of Senator Ben Cardin – glad to see you here; Senator thank you very much for coming – on anti-Semitism, racism, and intolerance. I also want to recall Chairman Alcee Hastings' decisive work as president of the Parliamentary Assembly and as our special representative on Mediterranean affairs. Congressman Richard Hudson has been playing an active role in the work of our Committee on Countering Terrorism, as has Congresswoman Shelia Jackson Lee on our Committee on Migration. Of course, we are proud to count on the political leadership of Senator Roger Wicker as OSCE PA vice president currently, and on Congressman Robert Aderholt before him.

Looking ahead, we are examining ways parliamentarians can further use their oversight role to advance international cooperation. Last year, our Committee on Countering Terrorism launched a unique exercise by encouraging parliaments of OSCE participating states to check how obligations of border security and information sharing got implemented. And we are move often contributing to the seminars to boost the – and strengthen national parliamentary oversight in OSCE countries in cooperation with OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human

Rights, as recently done in Georgia, in Kyrgyzstan, and we are planning another one in Armenia soon. Here again, our capacities remain to be fully explored. And we have to do so by expanding our partnerships worldwide.

Finally, let me outline the benefits of what is perhaps the most publicized places of our activities, election observation. This is a field where we cooperate closely with international partners, including NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Our engagement ensures greater expertise, accountability, and visibility to election observation. And our political sensitivity balances technical analysis and reinforces the credibility of the exercise. All this work helps ensure that universal values upheld by the OSCE are better known, understood, accepted, and shared. This follows our conviction that it is in the best interest of our citizens that they live in a world where there are more democracies, to achieve greater equality, increase civic engagement, fully enjoy fundamental human rights, and reduce chances of conflict. In the field of election observation and the other areas of our work, we face challenges which required our constant attention and additional efforts.

Chairman Hastings, Senator Cardin, Congressman Wilson, dear colleagues, to conclude I will come back to my initial question: What is the added value of parliamentary diplomacy for our citizens and constituents? To that, I would agree – I would argue that in upholding our shared principles, in promoting democratic values, and in preventing and settling conflicts, parliamentary diplomacy contributes to the fulfillment of humankind through the protection of certain unalienable rights, and among these, of course, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Although this may not always feel palpable in today's turbulent environment, we can see the impacts of an increased volatility of world affairs on the lives of ordinary citizens.

As a population that has paid a substantial price, both in blood and treasure, in conflicts around the globe, this nation is fully aware of the heavy toll of war. Americans understand that empowering diplomats today, it's wiser than deploying troops tomorrow. And with that in mind, it is also our role to combat the perception that we allocate too many funds and resources to international aid and diplomacy. I welcome the United States' support and their personal contribution to ensure that our organizations are fully equipped to meet our current challenges, and thus can contribute to bringing peace, stability, and democracy across the OSCE area and throughout the world. thank you very much.

HASTINGS: Thank you so much. I appreciate the illuminating remarks. Mr. Mesterházy, if you don't mind I'd like to call on Senator Cardin or any remarks that he may wish to make at this time.

CARDIN: Let me thank both of our distinguished witnesses. Mr. Tsereteli, thank you for your leadership in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I've been a member of the Helsinki Commission since 1993. So it's been a long period of time in my association with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. And I applaud your work. We were extremely proud of President Hastings' work when he had your chair and brought America to a new level of participation in the United States Congress to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. And that commitment that Chairman Hastings made is now being shared by members of the Senate and the House that are very actively engaged in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

It's nice to have our friends here from the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. We have a very robust participation of parliamentarians in the Parliamentary Assembly related to NATO. I met with our ambassador, and I think she fully understands the importance of the parliamentary dimension. So much so, I saw Senator Wicker – I know he was here earlier, and he had to go back. And we are right in the middle of a major – that's an understatement – historic. So I'm going to have to leave shortly.

I wanted you to know that we've used this model, Senator Wicker and I, to encourage the Organization of American States, OAS, to develop a parliamentary dimension within OAS. That legislation's moving in the United States Senate because we recognize that having parliamentarians involved in this process makes such a difference. So, Mr. President, I thank you for allowing me to be the personal representative on anti-Semitism, racism, and intolerance. I think we're making a difference.

We have a U.S. Helsinki Commission. It's a little bit different, because we have separation of branches here in our democracy. But we come together in our participation, even in the Parliamentary Assembly, because our executive branch people work with us to make sure that our voices can be effectively heard. So when we talk about the rise of anti-Semitism, it was first brought up in the U.S. Helsinki Commission and then promoted within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and then we – quite frankly – we got the Permanent Council to start to deal with some of these issues in Vienna. So it took a little while, but we got there.

The same thing is true in trafficking in persons. It started right here in our commission. And parliamentarians brought these issues. Mr. President, I couldn't agree more. I'm proud of the role that we played in regards to Russia's incursion into Ukraine. You couldn't do that in Vienna. You couldn't do – I mean –

HASTINGS: And in Georgia.

CARDIN: And in Georgia. And in Georgia, and in Moldova, and in other – absolutely. I don't mean to leave out your country, believe me. But you know that with a consensus organization it was not possible for these issues to be as effectively raised in Vienna as we could within the Parliamentary Assembly. We've made a big difference.

And one last point, if I might. You mentioned election monitoring. We need to up our game because interference in elections today – interference with the free and fair elections are taking different routes than they did a decade ago. Please understand the report that was issued – that I issued on behalf of the Senator Foreign Relations Committee a year ago about Russia's incursion – interference in elections in Europe as well as here in the United States. The Mueller Commission report that showed that Russia systematically tried to interfere in our 2016 elections. We need to understand as we monitor elections that there are member states within OSCE that are trying to interfere in our democratic free and fair elections. And we need to be part of that process.

So I just really wanted to come by to thank you for your extraordinary leadership. I can tell you we're going to continue to be actively engaged in the Parliamentary Assemblies of both NATO and OSCE.

Mr. Chairman, I would ask unanimous consent that my statement be made part of the record.

HASTINGS: Without objection.

Thank you so much, senator. And we understand this historic role that you and Senator Wicker play today. You have our best wishes in that regard. I would be remiss if I didn't say I think the House managers were excellent in their presentation. And I hope, against hope, that they could prevail.

CARDIN: As you know, Senator Wicker and I share so much in common in our fight for democracy, and human rights, and our commitment within the OSCE family. We differ on this issue, and there is a division. I want you to know that the House managers did an outstanding job in representing the House of Representatives before the United States Senate. And although there may be constitutional scholars in the future who will debate the conduct of the president, as to whether it merits impeachment or not, I don't believe there will be any debate about the misconduct of the United States Senate in failing to allow witnesses and documents to be produced in the trial.

I say that in front of our guests because one of the principles of the OSCE Helsinki Final Act is that we have the right to be introspective as to how we comply with our requirements. And quite frankly, it was this commission that raised the Guantanamo Bay detentions within OSCE as not complying with the Helsinki Final Accord. I think the way that the Senate conducted its trial doesn't offend the OSCE principles, but it does offend our own Constitution. And I just really wanted to point that out.

HASTINGS: All right. Thank you so much, Senator. Appreciate it. And you brought up Guantanamo Bay. I was president. And, George, you will remember Anne-Marie Lizin. She was very active on that Guantanamo piece. And I helped her to be able to go to Guantanamo, along with a delegation from OSCE, with the help of Secretary Colin Powell. So there's a lot of interaction.

Thank you, President Mesterházy. And if you would go forward with your remarks it would be deeply appreciated.

MESTERHÁZY: Thank you very much, Honorable Chairman Mr. Hastings, Honorable Members of the Congress Mr. Wilson and Mr. Cardin.

Well, a lot is happening nowadays in U.S. politics, which we follow quite closely because it's very important for us. Yeah, that's – perhaps would be a better option. But still, it's quite interesting. As you just said, Mr. Chairman, it's quite historical time for – not just for you, but I think for the whole world, what is happening here. So I – as a politician, I fully understand when

time is pressing, then of course if you have to address a distinguished audience, ladies and gentlemen. Then if I want to be heard, I have to speak loudly, they say. If I want to be understood, I have to be very clear and simple. But if I want to be loved, I have to be short. So I try to do my best. And let me start my testimony, ladies and gentlemen.

It's a great honor and privilege to speak before the U.S. Helsinki Commission, together with my friend George Tsereteli, president OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I'm also delighted to see some of my friends from the NATO delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, as we call NATO PA in short.

Before I address today's topic, let me first reassure you, to paraphrase the great Mark Twain: The report of NATO's brain death has been greatly exaggerated. NATO remains the bedrock of our security and a beacon of stability for our partners. Its strength lies in its military, economic, and technical prowess, in our vow to defend each other, and in our commitment to the values of democracy, individual liberty, human rights, and the rule of law. The NATO PA supports all these dimensions through parliamentary diplomacy.

My written submission highlights how the Assembly championed NATO enlargement, helped to make our effort in Afghanistan more effective, stood strong in the face of Russian aggression, and supported fairer burden sharing. And let me add, in all these cases the involvement of our U.S. delegation was crucial. In my remarks today I want to address three examples of where we are trying to make a difference today. The first one, defending our democratic values. The second one, adapting NATO for the future. And the third one, building lasting support for the alliance among our publics.

In recent years, questions have been raised about the democratic credentials of certain allies. We have therefore redoubled our efforts to preserve and promote the democratic values underpinning NATO both in public and in private. Last year, the assembly adopted several recommendations put forward by the head of the U.S. delegation to the NATO PA, Representative Gerry Connolly. We have called for a NATO structure to monitor and report on the democratic credentials of aspirant countries and spot any negative trends within allied countries also.

Of course, NATO government remains reluctant to discuss member states' internal affairs. But the Assembly will continue to protect and uphold democratic values and have forthright discussion with allied partners and delegations alike. NATO owes its longevity and vitality to its ability to adapt. At their meeting in London in December, NATO leaders laid out two new priorities for this adaptation. First, they asked the NATO secretary general to look into ways to strengthen NATO's political dimension. This is to help allies better address internal differences, such as over northern Syria last year. Our Assembly should play a key role in this reflection process.

Parliamentarians are much better placed than governments to discuss issues openly. Therefore, we have long provided a valuable forum for solving disagreements. And we have always overcome any differences we had, even on very important issues. Second – a second priority for NATO going forward will be to develop a common policy regarding China. Here,

the Assembly has been ahead of NATO for many years. We have long recognized that NATO much reckon with the economic and security dynamics in Asia. As early as 2005 Commissioner Boozman, then a member of the NATO PA, co-authored the report on China. We have closely followed developments ever since. This year we have three reports on China's rise and what it means for NATO, including one by Representative Mr. Connolly.

And the third new priority for NATO emerged when tensions with Iran rose considerably earlier this year. President Trump asked NATO to play a greater role in the Middle East. Here, again, our Assembly will support this reflection with two committee reports and several visits to the region this year. As NATO continues to adapt, I will urge my colleagues in the NATO PA, and I would urge you as well, to maintain our firm and united position on Russia, to keep our door open to Ukraine, Georgia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and to continue to support the reconciliation in the western Balkans. In turn, we will continue to push for fairer sharing of the burden for our common security.

Dear colleagues, NATO cannot survive without public support. In a time of widespread disinformation, it has become more difficult for allied governments and parliaments to explain to their publics why NATO remains indispensable. Since 2016, the Assembly has stepped up its communication efforts. Over three years, a working group on education and communication about NATO gathered an impressive amount of best national practices which could be shared with, and possibly replicated, in the member states. This year we will publish another report on the matter and call for action, because we must devote particular attention to our younger generation and explain that NATO is an investment in their future, and that security cannot be taken for granted.

Let me sum up. As a parliamentary institution our Assembly has three major advantages over NATO. First one: Our mandate is broader. We can address issues which are difficult for NATO to discuss openly or are not yet on its agenda. Second, our membership is more diverse, bringing together representatives of government and opposition. And the third one, we decide by majority voting rather than consensus. As NATO and the Assembly work together to strengthen our unique alliance going forward, the key to success lies in an ongoing commitment to the fundamental principles, values, and goals of the alliance. As guardians of principles of the Helsinki Final Act, you know too well that these values must remain our compass. Thank you very much for your attention.

HASTINGS: Thank you so very much. Both of you offered very illuminating remarks in concise form. And it's deeply, deeply appreciated. If you don't mind, my colleagues and I will have a few questions. I'll begin with just a few, and then turn it to him, and then come back with a few more.

What would both of you list as the achievement of – achievements of the OSCE and NATO Parliamentary Assembly in recent years? And looking further back, what are the Assembly's greatest achievements overall, particularly in helping to shape the OSCE and NATO as institutions, and to address the issues and challenges which have historically confronted those organizations? And with that question, we'll start with you, Mr. Tsereteli.

TSERETELI: Thank you very much, Chairman Hastings.

As you know well all the strengths and weaknesses of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, you have been at the foundations of this organization, I would say. I recall times when you started some new endeavors. I think main achievement in the last years of this Assembly is that it's more active, it's more visible, it's more credible, I would say. And it's very important in times when we see clear threats to multilateralism in different places, different areas. And also, we see a need for a multilateral response and an orchestrated and concerted response to the challenges that we have.

So Parliamentary Assembly at this moment, I would say, in quite a good shape to promote and to defend all the principles – although, we identify that there's a main challenge that we have. Unfortunately, disrespect and sometimes in a clear and very blatant violation of Helsinki principles, in the case of the recent ones Ukraine, and a little bit before in Georgia. There are violations of human rights in many countries of the OSCE. But also, ability to respond adequately to the emerging challenges. This is also, I think, one of the important features of this Assembly. So we have a lot of capacities in this Assembly.

And that's why I think it was very right step from our not only leadership of the whole Assembly when we responded to the migration crisis, or responded to terrorism, let's say, outbreaks in many corners of this world. You know that we created, for instance – and I think that it's an achievement of this Assembly to have been at the forefront of this battle – to facilitate, you know, the better treatment of – or, the whole process of migration flow in the world. And many OSCE countries – OSCE PA member countries are affected, and the people are affected.

So our parliamentarians in our ad hoc committee I think very active in this work. And it's not only just visiting the different places where people are suffering, and also governments are in a very difficult situation, and in many European countries, but also the negotiating with governments, giving them advice, giving them recommendations that we're debating in the parliament, and then producing guidelines how to better treat and manage and to cope with those challenges. And terrorism – on the terrorism issues, and United States are members of this. Congress and Senate, they are very much involved in those things with, of course, staff members.

And I think that's also very important instrument, not for just advertising that we are doing but genuinely contributing to the process. It's human rights issue, these are, of course, issues to battle crime. And of course, to have much more better understanding of what we need to fight down terrorism, to prevent radicalization. And I would also say that we opened up a few new, let's say, avenues. Appointing new representatives, it means that we are starting – let's say, new – it's a new endeavor.

We are starting new activities. The first time with the civil society, and we're going to civil society representatives to work with the civil society. First time we have now a special rep to tackle corruption. And it's – I think this scourge, it's problematic in many countries, also

sneaking into political, let's say – actively political layers. And of course, affecting even democratic process, like elections, in many OSCE participating countries.

We are working and we're starting to work more closely with youth. And I'd like to thank you very much – you, personally, and the Helsinki staff here. There's Alex Tiersky and others. And we had a very important conference that was completely yesterday. Almost 50 parliamentarians from 25 countries together in cooperation with Helsinki Commission, because this new generation should be, you know, more in power. Should be, I guess, supported, because they can contribute, sometimes much more better than an old generation.

But those are I think, important – some new openings in the Parliamentary Assembly. And of course, I would like to say that we kept and we even increased our credibility in our election observation. This is one of the most important steps that we are making. We are working in the regions. We extended very much and expanded space where we are operating. It's not only that the few countries, but in many regions we are doing our job, we are very active, we are traveling there, we are dedicating our time and resources to that – to interacting with the leaders in those countries, interacting with the civil societies, with the youth, with the opposition. And I think this job is visible. And we see in many countries that parliamentary diplomacy, parliamentary democracy is much more frequently debated – and not only debated, but many governments that are shifting now to the parliamentary systems. And I think that's very important.

HASTINGS: Thank you so very much. Let me compliment you on the special representative to youth, and offer up a suggestion for you and I, between now and Vienna, to do a joint opinion editorial type piece and see if we can get it published in some of the media magazines that undertake to do that. I'll work with you and have Alex talk to Roberto about us being able to put something together.

Another thing for the benefit particularly of the young people here, to show you how organizations sometimes don't receive the attention that I believe they rightly deserve, 20 years ago the OSCE was discussing migration. Twenty years ago. And it was a constant refrain, if you recall, George, that led to us forming the Mediterranean Partnership. We saw what was developing and were tracking it. And therefore you hear the president now saying that we were able, through his efforts and the parliamentarians' efforts, to consult with and offer suggestions to countries that are confronted with that problem. But it didn't just start five years ago. It actually started 20 years ago, the actual discussions.

One of the most pressing geopolitical issues – and, excuse me, I didn't have Mr. Mesterházy answer the first question. I apologize to you.

MESTERHÁZY: Thank you very much. Well, let me start with some historical achievements. Well, NATO is the – one of the strongest, and most efficient, and most successful alliance in this regard. So the last 70 years were a success in this regard, to keep security, stability, and peace among the allies. So I would say that the existence of NATO and the history of NATO in itself, great historical achievement.

So if you want to add something, as a Hungarian politician, perhaps some other historical move of NATO was the open-door policy, which is in the article of the constitution of NATO. It was really important for the country, not just because of the fact that we wanted to join an alliance where we can find security, peace, but because of the fact that NATO is also some kind of alliance which is based on values, not just a military alliance. So that's why I think it's a really historical achievement.

And it think it's really important to say that we have this open policy, and all the sovereign nations can decide what to do with their future. So we could not and cannot accept the fact that someone says that Georgia or Ukraine cannot join the NATO because of some geopolitical issues or concerns of Russia, or any other countries. We should reject that. And we have to keep the pace to say that they have to decide. And, of course, if they fulfill the criteria, then they can join this alliance.

Some other short examples. In 2014, for example, in the NATO PA, we had a decision to expel Russian delegation following its illegal annexation of Crimea. We say it was an aggression. And we keep this decision. So we do not change. I just want to mention that the Council of Europe changed the situation in the last months, perhaps, because they let the Russian delegation to come back to the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe. We have a different approach in NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

I would also recall the burden sharing issue. We had a very open and frank debate in the NATO PA about this issue. And I'm very proud of my colleagues that they are very frank, very open in the discussions, so we could achieve quite nice achievements. I brought a report – as a reporter – I also brought a report about the burden sharing. So I also know how to spell the rapporteur. (Laughter.)

So, and of course, I would mention – just my colleague, my friend just mentioned – the young generation because, as I said in my oral testimony, that sometimes I feel that the young generation take it for granted that we have this security situation, we have peace, we have stability in our countries. And we see in a moment that it's not the case. So we have to always be very vigilant and to explain to them: This is not – there is a price for that. And we have to work for it and fight for it almost every day in our alliance. So I think that's why it's very important what we achieve with this education program and communication plan, what the NATO Parliamentary Assembly just put together. Thank you very much.

HASTINGS: One more question for me, and then I'll turn to my colleague, Mr. Wilson.

Both of you have mentioned in part, but I'd like for you to retrace and describe the role of your assemblies in addressing the ongoing war in Ukraine and the still unresolved conflicts in the Transnistria region of Moldova, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, and of course the occupied regions in Georgia. What contributions can and does the Parliamentary Assemblies of your two organizations make towards the resolution of these conflicts? And I learned the term "frozen conflicts" when I became a member of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. But I thought by now some of them would have thawed. But

climate change notwithstanding, they seem to remain frozen. So what are the ways that you all are addressing this war in Ukraine and the unresolved frozen conflicts?

TSERETELI: Thank you for this question. We partly touched upon those issues in our testimony. And first, let's say part, you are right. Unfortunately, climate change doesn't help in this situation. It's no warm is deciding over these frozen conflicts. And of course, the main – and the most challenging issue for us in the Parliamentary Assembly, not only in our Parliamentary Assembly, but broadly speaking about – broadly speaking about the whole international community. Those are conflicts in OSCE region. The region is a big region. We are representing more than 1 million people. And it's stretched from, as we used to say, from Canada to Russia. From Vancouver to Vladivostok. It might also change some spots now, but it's still that.

It's a big region, and it's effected by conflicts. Let's say the challenges stem from violation of Helsinki principles, and that we observed previously in other countries, like you mentioned Moldova, then it was Georgia, now it's Ukraine. We're responding with our means, what we have in the Parliamentary Assembly. We can adopt resolutions. They are very strong. We're attracting attention of – our society's attention, our stakeholders', and also shaming all those countries and then the regimes and leaders who are, let's say, occupying territories or forcibly changing borders, or letting a lot of people to suffer from those activities. And we are very strong in that. I already said that there are a number of documents and resolutions that we adopted after debating and after harsh discussions sometimes were mostly members of U.S. Congress taking part in the discussions. So one is a resolution that we are adopting, are the documents, which are important.

Another one is proactive work. When I became president, I said that Ukraine will be priority for us. And I think number of visits prove that. Personally, I've been there more than five times. We sent a few times our Third Committee and other committee members to work with their counterparts, to go on the frontline, where I've been also with the secretary general with a big group of people, to attest ourselves what's happening there, to talk to the local communities, to even hear those – you know, the sharing even being at that time, and talking to people, and to see ourselves what war brings. I know it, myself, because of my region and my country, but in the Ukraine it was much more bigger scale.

So this is another type of intervention. I have also very recently been there, having a very, very important and substantive discussions with the leadership and new leadership of the parliament, with the minister of foreign affairs. And with them, also trying to identify that we can more effectively contribute to the peace building and to implementation of these agreements, because we understand that everybody knows that for the implementation of Minsk agreements to the settlement of this conflict, we need robust peace. There should be – there should be a robust peace, no violation of ceasefire. And that will be the first prerequisite to that.

And another one is to ease the plight of people there, the humanitarian aspect of the conflict. When parliamentarians really can make change, and with the interaction with both sides, it's very difficult to reach agreements with the Russian delegation. I met a few times, I know that. We're not refusing to meet them, to discuss something. We're trying to involve them

more constructively. Sometimes asking them to make some small steps, whether it be in Ukraine, whether it be in Georgia, to help local communities, to help people who are suffering there because of occupation, because of – because of the conflict, and because of the war.

But so far, we unfortunately don't see many constructive steps. This is one thing I'd like to say that we even welcome this small things which happened in Ukraine recently. The exchange of prisoners – these are not small for their families, that's why we welcome that – but it's a small step in a conflict settlement. So that's why we'd like to try to nurture any achievement it will have in the conflict.

So with Georgia, I will conclude very soon – in Georgia we still have grave situation, because of ongoing occupation, because of ongoing annexation, because of ongoing illegal borderization. And people are living in the areas of the occupation line and adjacent territories in constant fear, and in very difficult situations. It's a huge and grave discrimination. There's a very well-known case of imprisonment – illegal imprisonment. A very famous doctor. And I'm very much thankful to our partners in the international community. There was a very consolidated effort that he was released quite soon. But those are, let's say, very vivid examples what happening there. And we have no right to – not to be active, not to be decisive. And I think involvement of United States and our partners, it's very important.

Pressure on Russia is important. And I think that in case when we can't achieve in our results with agreements, with then negotiations and sanctions one of the – one of the measures. And I think that if in future also U.S. and other countries consider the European Union, that also Georgia issues and Georgian occupation would be included in sanctions, I think it might also be some additional, let's say, help to this process. And finally, about the Azerbaijan and Armenia, it's, I would say, yes, at this moment, it's a very fragile peace. Now, the OSCE is involved in every place, because we have – we are participating in the Minsk process. There's the Minsk Group, also in other conflicts. But also in – between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

But we are also trying to identify where parliamentarians can be helpful. And I already stated here, but we are always cautious not to harm any process which might be going on between executive branch, between the leaders. I personally met Prime Minister Pashinyan in Yerevan recently and just came back a week ago from Azerbaijan, also meeting Azerbaijani president. And always in those meetings we're trying to, you know, convince that the only way is peace there. And asking also them how parliamentarians could be helpful. So this confidence building, peace building measures I think in this parliamentarians can play their role.

HASTINGS: Thank you so very much for that intervention. Just a point of historical reference that has no particular relevance, but when I became president, the very first meeting that I undertook was with Sergey Lavrov. I went to Russia to meet with him. And it's so interesting, because at that time I had so much hope. And I left the meeting feeling real good. Need I say more . And let me, Mr. Mesterházy compliment your organization for your actions with reference to Russia that you mentioned. But, if you would, go forward to discuss the other parts of the question that I asked, or anything else you may wish to add.

MESTERHÁZY: Thank you very much. I think you are doing this job because I think very important words were said, so I would just like to add something. I would say that remember the Alamo. Not to forget, because I have the experience that sometimes even politicians forgot about these issues that you just mentioned. They just forgot that we have these regions in our world. And sometimes the people who are living there, they just say that we are left behind. And when time is passing, of course, we are used to the situation, what is happening there, what kind of frozen conflicts are there. And I think the most important thing that we raise awareness and don't forget, remember what is happening there, what is the situation there, and how do people suffer there?

The second, which I would like to add, is that we had interparliamentary council meeting in Brussels last week with the Ukrainian members of their parliament. And I told them that usually we refer to the Ukrainian conflict as a frozen conflict. This is not a frozen conflict. This is boiling very much. It's a hot conflict. Every month people die in that war. So even – we have a ceasefire, but even in January they just gave me some data about that, several people died in that region because of the war. So that's why I would say that keep in mind the Ukrainian conflict is not a frozen conflict. And we have to keep talking about that, and we have to keep pushing all those parties that are involved to solve this problem. And we cannot accept the fact that a country just decides to, you know, take a territory of another country.

As a Hungarian, I can tell you that we have historical examples. And of course, we are not happy with that time. But that's history. So that's the two things that I wanted to just add. So remember the Alamo and that the Ukrainian conflict is not a frozen one. Thank you very much.

HASTINGS: Mr. Mesterházy, do you know the name Tom Lantos? You do? Tom was – yeah, I went to Hungary with him for my first visit to Hungary. I was not a member of the parliament at that time. But he was one tremendous individual, just a pleasure to know, as is my pleasure to know my good friend Joe Wilson, who I turn to.

Yes, please.

TSERETELI: I'd like to say that there's a very important function to our field visits, to our field missions. And I said in the first part of my presentation that in – for instance, in south Caucasus, there are no missions in the places that are most needed. And this blockage is because of political grounds. In Ukraine – and I'd like also to give credit to this mission, the special monitoring mission. They are doing great job there. They are helping communities. They are not only monitoring ceasefire but they are very actively working with the local communities on helping them. So it should be admitted and should be supported. So that's what I wanted to say, and to open up to have more, let's say, leverages, to have more possibilities to act in the places that OSCE is needed. I think it's a big question still. And it's not settled at this moment. And I think with our executive branch we have to work on this issue.

HASTINGS: Thank you for that.

Mr. Wilson.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And indeed, I was so happy that you referenced Congressman Tom Lantos, his wife Annette, just dear people. And what a tribute he was as to the success and involvement of Hungarian Americans across our country, particularly in light of the revolution in 1956. Something very important to me, life-changing, on June 10, 1990 – I was a state senator – I had the opportunity to be an election observer in Bulgaria, their first elections after 30 years of fascism and communism. And it just was so incredible to me to tour the region of Plovdiv Hissar, and just to see the country come to life.

And then I had the opportunity to host Assemblyman Stefan Stoyanov of the – Mr. Chairman, you'd approve – the vice chair of the Democratic Party of Bulgaria, which he also told me was really the Republican Party. But that's another story. But it was just a – I had the assemblyman visit and meet with civic clubs – Rotary, Lions – and it was just a – such a positive experience. And then I later had Ambassador Peter Burian of Slovakia – our primaries in South Carolina, presidential, are on Saturday. And so it's really extraordinary, where whole families will be coming to vote. And then they're so excited to meet persons from around the world. And indeed, I extend an invitation for both organizations. There'll be a presidential primary on February the 29th in our state. And would be happy to accommodate or coordinate anyone who would like to participate.

With that in mind, how important are the observation teams? And what can we learn from this? And is there a selection process of countries that may not be particularly, say, at the OSCE level or the NATO level? And beginning with President Tsereteli and then President Mesterházy.

TSERETELI: Thank you. As you know, election observation is one of the main and more visible – the most visible activities of the Parliamentary Assembly. We have this privilege to coordinate this process because when it comes to international observation, Parliamentary Assembly is like an umbrella organization. But we're cooperating, of course, with all others. And I'd like to thank Parliamentary Assembly of NATO, along with other institutions, to be, again, our good partners. It's not easy process, because we have challenges. Maybe I would like to – maybe I'll just single out a few of them. One, there's a challenge now that we see the clear attempts to undermine this credible observation by us. You know, with the creation of different other organizations, other institutions. Sometimes they go into the countries at one invitation or financing of governments or regimes, somehow to create a different picture rather than we see there. This is one challenge. We're trying to confront this.

Another one, of course, it's integrity and credibility. Our mission so far, we never had any problems with that. We never had failures with them. And we are very thorough in selecting teams, thorough in selecting people who will be in charge, who will keep to the standards, keep with the rules that we have. And the main rule is impartiality, it's neutrality. And to use that methodology which is provided by ODIHR, by our main Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. And when it comes to the countries, as you mentioned about the countries, we are also trying to be fair, because with the new technologies, with the new ideas – sometimes not very positive ideas to elections, as Chairman Hastings said – this also – this is also a challenge.

And here no country is secure. You mentioned a few times the U.S. case in 2016. I've been here at the head of delegation, as the special coordinator for 2018 elections. They were much more, of course, secured and better than – but in other countries too we could see some similar, let's say, threats. For instance, the first time in the history of our observation, Germany invited Parliamentary Assembly and ODIHR two years ago to observe elections. We've been in Italy. We've been in the United Kingdom. And this is also little bit burdening us, because without more contributions there are even more demand. But the demand is very adequate, because the threats are adequate. And we see that the interventions, interference, fake news, using social media, using new technologies – now is a big question, with 5G, and I think we have to also respond to that in field of election observation too, because it poses different, maybe new, threats too if not addressed properly.

So I would say that election observation, it's a very active exercise. Thank you for participation when the United States senators and congressmen they can, because it's not easy to come over all the time to Europe or to Central Asia. But we also see some very promising things. There are backslidings in certain countries, but we see the better, let's say, the trends, for instance in Central Asia. I was recently in Uzbekistan. We saw genuine will there of people, of the society. Attempt also from the authorities to have a new legislature incorporate the recommendations of ODIHR. But on the performance side, there are still problematic issues. So we will continue that.

And also with this I would like to thank secretary general, because we are also strengthening our own capacities, our own capabilities to have a more clear guidelines to our observers, because their work is very effective. And I guess that the political side of this observation, which is quite sensitive, I think it should be carried out very thoroughly, very professionally, and we feel this responsibility. We feel that this credibility is very precious.

WILSON: Thank you. And, Mr. President –

MESTERHÁZY: I had something there, because you have a lot of credit, and I think OECD did a tremendous job in this regard. So I think you have great guidelines and credibility is absolutely – is fantastic. One thing I think which is important, and that question is very important to me, that I think this is a new phenomena that now we should keep in mind that even among NATO countries and EU countries, this is an issue. Before we thought some years ago that it's no question that we have very transparent and fair elections. But now with, for example, intervention or wishes, different countries like Russia, we have to keep in mind that this kind of observation is a – is a new challenge for us. Not just those countries which are not involved in these organizations. Thank you very much.

WILSON: Well, I found too that, Mr. President, that it's not judgmental. You go and you learn. You can see things being done in another country, or in particular another state. We have, like, 50 laboratories of democracy. And to visit overseas and see party lists, that was somewhat startling. And then to see each American state is so different, requiring a runoff, either 40 or 50 percent. And then it's interesting to explain to people overseas that we run every

two years but, really, we have primaries, like every 17 months. And so it's – secretary general, it keeps people on their toes.

And so also I share another view with our chairman, and that is that we had such high hopes for Russia. And Russia has been involved obviously continuing with OSCE but was an observer with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. For each of you, what do you see that we can do to expand involvement and promote an open society in what should be a great country?

TSERETELI: As I rightly understand to support civil society, and you're talking about Russia, itself?

WILSON: Yes, yes.

TSERETELI: Yeah. So if Russia will change its strategy and there could be more constructive and not exercise policies that currently they are exercising in many countries, and not in a neighborhood but also other countries. So it would be, I think, a great achievement for everybody. But, again, you know, you're absolutely right. We have to support or have more – be more engaged with the civil society there, with the activists there. They're in quite a difficult – living under quite a difficult circumstances. There's a very – you know, the limited freedom of expression in Russia. We see it many times in our crackdowns when people are assembling in the streets. And also the case which we are now additionally – we flagged up in cooperation with the Helsinki Commission, about the assassination of Nemtsov. It's also prevention for maybe other cases in the future.

But what you can do more as a United States Congressman, of course having many instruments in this country, to be more engaged with the Russian society, Russian civil society, and the people there who are thinking differently. You know, whose conviction is that one day Russia also might become a democratic country. I don't know when it will be. It's our desire to make this process – you know, to see it's sooner rather than later. But that's a very difficult process. You saw the recent developments also in Russia, how they're reshuffling all the government, they're making different structures. I understand it's their own issue. We're not interfering with that. But unfortunately then we see grave results of the policies.

That's why we're trying to convince them to send their messages. And United States also can do it much more, let's say, effectively than maybe some small countries, and even sometimes the big, multilateral organizations. So this is a process which should be, of course, the – this is also your foreign policy priority. And I think it's one of the main priorities of your foreign policy. And sometimes we are waiting what Washington will say. And we also appreciate now the trip of your state secretary to different countries – to Belarus, to – I think to Central Asia, to also – it was in Ukraine. And I think it's quite a strong, let's say, exercise to talk with those governments, and to try to convince them that it's better to be on the side of a much more civilized world.

WILSON: Hear, hear.

MESTERHÁZY: Well, I think Russia is heading towards a different direction, not an open society. What Mr. Putin is doing is absolutely different, quite sure, as you just mentioned. Isolation perhaps not a good way either. So the dialogue is very important with Russia. But I always try to, or want to add to this sentence that the dialogue is important, but you cannot send a message that the dialogue means that business as usual, because some things, some events happened in the past – with Ukraine and some other steps with Russia, which are very much threatening. So that's why I think we have to somehow balance that it doesn't mean if we have a dialogue with Russia, for example, it doesn't mean we don't care what happened in the past. So I think that's quite tricky, how can we manage these two together. But that's a challenge. That's why we're here, to solve these problems. Thank you very much.

WILSON: Want to thank both presidents. And, President Tsereteli.

TSERETELI: I think I want to add something. It's very important to keep this dialogue. That our organization is for dialogue. That's the main geostrategic philosophy of OSCE is to sit at the table and to convince each other, and to make compromises. But I'm always, in my meetings, whether that will be with Minister Lavrov or other dignitaries from Russia, or Russian delegation, dialogue doesn't mean to, let's say, gain time. And we sometimes see that policy. Dialogue means that you have to reach goals. That should be a concrete roadmap what to do, how to solve this problem. So we, of course, will keep dialogue. And, again, we'll always push for dialogue. But we'd like to see also reciprocity in this process. When you are making step, the other side also should make step. And unfortunately, we don't see that from Russian side so far. But we are hopeful.

WILSON: Thank you very much.

HASTINGS: Thank you, Mr. Wilson. And thank you all for your interventions.

Just a couple of more things, then I think we have to clear the room. First, just as a point of personal privilege, one as both of you and others that have fought for gender equality in these organizations, I am especially pleased that NATO has taken a forward step in putting Ms. Popa in her position. I really highly – really, really am pleased about that. I do have a suggestion for you, Madam Secretary, along with the secretary general of the OSCE. If you all would consider, we're always planning ahead as far as we can for our next meeting.

If it could be thought about in three or four years, perhaps, trying to have NATO and OSCE meet in the same country at the same time. And one of the benefits that I think that could be derived from that is cross-pollination of NATO parliamentarians and OSCE parliamentarians on significant issues that they could join to discuss. And it would make it easier. And at least it's a thought. It may have occurred in the past. I have no memory of the two organizations meetings in the same city at the same time. But I think that could be achieved if you all were to give some thought to it.

Lest we think all of the problems are somewhere else other than the United States, my next question is for both of you, and then finally, Mr. Tsereteli, I'm going to ask you a couple of things and see what your views are in that regard. The United States played a central role in the

creation of both NATO and the OSCE. Washington's leadership from time to time has come under question in your respective Assemblies. I've been there when it occurred.

To Mr. Tsereteli, in the OSCE some have suggested that shortcomings in the U.S. human rights record could hamper the ability of the United States to work to defend and promote human rights in other OSCE states. As you prepare to pass the office of OSCE PA president to another parliamentarian, and to become the president emeritus or elder statesman, like I am, of the Assembly, please give us an honest evaluation of how you see the United States evolving as an OSCE-participating state.

Have we come closer to representing the ideal many Europeans have of America? And are we able to credibly push human rights as a key element of our foreign policy? The Parliamentary Assembly has raised concern about the death penalty here in the United States, abuses of Guantanamo Bay, and use of extraordinary rendition, fatal police shootings of unarmed African American males, migration policy, and some experts of the U.S. elections – or, aspects of the U.S. election process, and the official U.S. response to climate change in recent years.

And to Mr. Mesterházy, some have suggested that the sometimes unpredictable rhetoric from Washington regarding NATO in recent years has proved problematic for transatlantic unity. And how would you characterize U.S. participation and messaging in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in this context?

And, George, if you would go first I'd appreciate it.

TSERETELI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You are right, as an organization having its goals and the assessment practices sometimes in our resolutions, or in fact-finding missions, or analyzing different facts, we are critical. And I think it's a fair process, because if any country doesn't have that standards, or we see a deviation from the main principles, or just agreed to the same values, we always have to indicate that. And this is a source of integrity and credibility. I'm using that word because I think that is very important for the organization.

That's why I'm also sometimes referring to the conclusions which we provided here after our election for the OSCE. There is a lot of criticism. And I always felt a little bit uncomfortable criticizing U.S. election system coming also from the original country of the – even in Europe, we – in many countries use different systems. So there are critical things. And it's good. You know, all these sovereign governments, they are taking that, and then they are working on that, how to overcome it.

When it comes to human rights, and of course election observation indicates of human rights issues when it comes to registration, voting, and others. But you mentioned a few problematic issues related with U.S. Yes, there are those problems we see there. Authorities, they know that. And I think U.S. addresses and will address those issues. But when it comes to involvement of United States in the process of human rights protection in in the OSCE area or our activities there, I think it's significant.

I'd like to once again mention your input, anti-trafficking activities, anti-terrorism activities, protecting children, and then flagging out this issue in many resolutions. And of course, supporting the activities like our main OSCE venue, which is a human rights implementation meeting, which we are organizing in Vienna always, and United States are supporting that very much. Although some countries always try to find different reasons to block agendas or to do some, let's say, more negative moves. But we always count on support of United States. And it's very evident that that is clear.

And of course, all over the world when we are going to the regions to identify human rights problems there, Russia is quite clear in that, and some other countries. We see problems in Central Asia with some countries with the civil society participation. And also, the assuring fundamental human rights. From occupied territories and conflict zones, which is very important. And I think we appreciate very much your involvement and your support, whether it be debates, whether it be resolutions, or whether it be active participation. And even helping some of the countries to shape better policies than to press some governments to change their – change their strategies.

HASTINGS: Mr. Mesterházy.

MESTERHÁZY: I agree. Some words about the gender issue. My predecessor, Ms. Madeleine Moon, did a lot on this issue. So we appreciate very much, and I want to follow her footsteps. So I think we have done a lot. And I'm quite sure that we – there's much more to do. So we very much focus on gender equality and not some other issues, but we would like to follow these guidelines.

The second question you just mentioned, well, the unpredictable rhetoric, as you just said, well, it's not a unique thing. It's not an American one, because I would say the French president sometimes surprises us also. So and then we just trying to find out what was the message. So to be more frank and serious, while definitely you have a different president than before, so the presidential style are different. Of course, first you have to get used to it. So you have to understand what is, why is happening. Now we know that it's much easier to see the Twitter than to read several pages of reports.

So I think it's not unusual, because I think when the president said something, as I understood, he wanted to highlight some of the issues which are important for him, or for the United States. And for example, about the burden sharing issue, it was raised by President Obama also. So it was a – it was not new for the allies, member states. But, of course, perhaps the frankness of the expression was different with Mr. Trump. But that was, I think, accepted. And some moves were taken among the allies. So I think we have results, because we could increase the whole budget for the military spending among NATO members. Even my country has a plan to increase the military expansive – the 2 percentage of the GDP, which is a rule in NATO. So I think that's fine.

The other thing is that I would like to mention is that we always, of course, listen to the words, but see the actions. And I think that's another thing. And the last, but not least, that the U.S. delegation in the NATO PA is very active. They speak in one voice. And we feel every

time their full commitment and engagement with NATO. So we don't have any issue about that. And even the Congress had issued several resolution, or what is the perfect name for that, regarding this. Ms. Pelosi was in Brussels last year. So I think we have a lot of, you know, messages from the members of Congress, that they are very much engaged. Thank you very much for that.

HASTINGS: I appreciate you for that. There was one period, a former congressman from Nebraska, a Republican colleague of mine named Doug Bereuter was president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly at the same time that I was president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. In addition, Newt Gingrich appointed Doug and I to do the monitoring of the reversion of Hong Kong and Macau to China. So he and I became and still are very fast friends, working in international relations.

Unfortunately, we don't have the time to talk about human dimension and implementation, OSCE transparency – something I like to talk about. OSCE support, we did touch a little bit on democracy in Georgia. Something that we always raise is the Roma and Sinti. We have mentioned Belarus here. We did touch briefly on the Balkans, not very much on Central Asia and big changes that are going on there. We haven't discussed Turkey, and we could probably spend an hour on that, particularly as it pertains to NATO, and the alliance of our values and democratic backsliding.

We did touch briefly on diversity, but it's bigger than just the gender issue. You're now – we have with the help of the Helsinki Staff, particularly Dr. Mischa Thompson, and Alex Johnson, and Robert Hand – we have a component of Afro-Europeans that are in parliaments. And they're beginning to show up in our respective parliaments. I don't know very much about that and NATO. We didn't talk about the INF Treaty, arms control, only a little bit about NATO, Iran, and Middle East security. So we're leaving these things on the table, but that doesn't mean that we aren't going to go back to that table at another point in time.

George, I'd like to end by asking you two questions, and ask you to be as brief as possible. What practical challenges do you face in your international engagement? And can you elaborate just a little bit more on partnership with other organizations, as well as OSCE PA efforts to increase contacts with OSCE partners for cooperation, especially in the Mediterranean, that you know that I have a continuing interest in? And we just came a few months ago from a CODEL to Tunisia and Morocco. And you may very well remember Gert Weisskirchen and Bruce George – who could forget Bruce George? But we were some of the originators of the Mediterranean Partners. So if you would end with that. And, Mr. Mesterházy, if you have any final comments we would appreciate it. As well as you, Congressman Wilson. You would have the last word after they speak. Briefly.

TSERETELI: Thank you. Yeah, I will try to be very brief. Of course, there are the challenges I mentioned about that. If you ask me, as the president of the organization, what practical challenges we have, it's not related mostly with the resources, the financial means. It's a big organization, but very effective in managing its small resources. Of course, the secretary general always would be happy to have it more, because with more we are doing more. And as I said, it's a huge demand. I think that our parliamentarians are eager to work. They're always

coming and asking for different – they have ideas. That’s very good. But also that we have to contribute from staff side with different and new openings.

And I think that it’s not a practical impediment. It’s more than, you know, this demand for more activities and more for actions, which is needed. Of course, the main problematic issue is that to dealing – to deal with the governments who not respect fully Helsinki principles. That’s a very important barrier that we have in our work. But nevertheless, we’re trying to move on. We’re trying to be active, as I said. We extended quite successfully our functioning and operation and extended our partnership with many other institutions. Not only with NATO, but also with others. And periodically we’re exchanging, you know, delegations. I was the president going to speak at other assemblies, we’re inviting them. But also very important, the original dimension of this cooperation.

Mediterranean, you’re very experienced in that. I think what you started as a special representative, having – you know, and building up this partnership, I think after some years it’s resulted with quite a unique, and a big, and important gathering in Morocco, which you also were there with a whole delegation. I think it somehow was a breakthrough that we have this meeting a country beyond OSCE region, and also bringing these values, and discussing their human rights, discussion their economic cooperation, human different dimensions, and trying also – and we see there that genuine interest in the activities that we are doing.

And I also would like to add to that that we had a very interesting and important meeting with the Egyptian leaders in Cairo, which are first time it happened in the history of our Assembly. So it means that despite of some practical barriers that every organization experienced, I myself, and we all – we’re trying to overcome that, and we’re trying to keep that, you know, important function for this OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the big value-based, the principle-based organization. And I think that this parliamentary diplomacy and this work that we are doing together – I appreciate also your great support – is worth it. It means – for our citizens it means a lot to the communities. And it could help us to make difference, this work.

HASTINGS: Thank you so much. Mr. Mesterházy.

MESTERHÁZY: Thank you very much. Well, for me personally challenge to keep the members active in the Parliamentary Assembly, because without them, of course, it’s a much less what we can do. So I would like to broaden, you know, the scope of activities to somehow give the chance for the members to find their interests and topics and issues in the Parliamentary Assembly. The second challenge is that we have a tremendous knowledge and experience in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly – in the reports, resolutions, visits, et cetera. And sometimes the governments, you know, don’t use too much. So in the economic sphere they use much more reports and others. And personally, of course, the members use this information. But perhaps the governments could do more in this regard.

The third one is there are some hot issues on the table of NATO – for example, regarding China, just to mention one. And we have some point of conflicts or different interests as the members of the – of the NATO. So we have to somehow overcome and keep the one voice type of policy in these issues. And I would like to add just one last but not least, that this reflection

process, which more or less started in NATO, and the leader of this process is the secretary general of NATO, I think should be very much balanced. Because the reflection is very important because the world is changing, the security environment is changing, new threats are coming. That's fine. NATO did it in the last 70 years, always adapt, adapt.

But it should not mean that something is wrong with the bedrock of NATO, the basis – the basic values of NATO, which it's built up on. I think that's very important to differentiate, that it doesn't mean that NATO is weak, that NATO is brain dead, to be more precise. It means that we have to change, we have to adapt to the new environment. But the core of NATO is important today also. And it's a treasure for us, as member states. So I think that's very important, to somehow find a balance. And if I can conclude, just let me add some sentences that I would like on the record. That I'm very much thankful to my colleagues in NATO PA, and to the Secretary General Ruxandra Popa and her team, that they prepare all this stuff for us. So thank you very much again for their work and time that they put in us to help us. Thank you very much.

HASTINGS: Mr. Wilson.

WILSON: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And indeed, it's a dream come true to me to have both of you here, from the Republic of Georgia, from the Republic of Hungary. I grew up as a Cold Warrior with always the hopes that one day we would have the success of OSCE, the most successful military alliance in the history of the world NATO, the liberation of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It was always hoped. But it has occurred. And so that's why I'm an optimist. And I believe this is truly bipartisan. So I look forward to continue working with Chairman Hastings and working with you. And it's just exciting to have both of you so positive and helpful, and looking to a brighter future across the world. Thank you.

HASTINGS: I echo those same sentiments. And I thank you both, and especially thank your staffs for working with us.

Just the point that you made, Mr. Mesterházy, and you as well, Mr. Tsereteli, about these changes and now this evolving is ongoing. It may not look like it today, when you mentioned China – and we didn't have the time to explore – we could take a day on that easily. But when you mentioned it, the thing we think of from NATO's perspective is military. But just think about this, if this coronavirus becomes a pandemic, then we have some security issues. And people in the military are going to be called on to do extraordinary things. So we have to begin thinking, you know, about a lot of stuff that is not ordinary for us to think about.

I thank you all so very much. And if you would, with the secretary generals, if we could take quick pictures before we get out. And I've got my picture that I've got for you.

[Whereupon, at 11:28 a.m., the hearing ended.]