

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

“North Macedonia’s Leadership of the OSCE in a Time of War”

Commission Members Present:

**Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Chairman;
Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), Co-Chairman;
Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS), Ranking Member;
Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN), Ranking Member;
Representative Victoria Spartz (R-IN);
Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT);
Representative Mike Lawler (R-NY)**

Witnesses:

**Bujar Osmani, Foreign Minister and OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, North
Macedonia**

**The Hearing Was Held From 1:00 p.m. To 1:52 p.m., Washington, D.C.,
Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Chairman, Commission for Security and
Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

Date: Tuesday, February 28, 2023

CARDIN: (In progress) – and welcome the ambassador of North Macedonia. It's an honor to have both of you here with us today.

I want to congratulate our new chair of the Helsinki Commission. This is Congressman Wilson's first official hearing as the chair of our Helsinki Commission. I must tell you I had the honor of chairing in the last Congress, and the cooperation and support I got from Congressman Wilson made it a very successful term. So I pledge to you my full support. This is nonpartisan/bipartisan support for the work of the Helsinki Commission.

And I'm joined in that, of course, with my partner, Senator Wicker. Now, Senator Wicker is very active. He's the vice president of the Parliamentary Assembly. (Audio break) – the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine to show our total support for the Ukrainians in defending themselves through the help of the OSCE, as well as through our member states.

I say that having just returned from Vienna at a meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. We were able to maintain total unity among the OSCE states. I want to thank Senator Wicker. He helped draft a declaration that was adopted. As you know, we had a consensus minus one also on our actions. We got it done through a magic wand.

But it was clearly a good statement by the Commission. It was approved by the Bureau, which did not have Russian representatives, so we could get that done. But it isolated Russia because they're the aggressor and they need to end this war. And it has to end with the sovereignty of the Ukrainian people – (inaudible) – the Ukrainians – the Russians being held accountable for their war crimes and the damages that they've caused. So, to me, that's going to be your greatest challenge as the Chair-in-Office, and it'll be a pleasure to work with you.

I want to mention one other issue before yielding the floor. I am the Special Representative for Anti-Semitism, Racism, and Intolerance in the Parliamentary Assembly. And I just urge you to continue your focus. We thank you for the meeting that you held. I participated in that meeting, and I appreciate it very much. As you may be aware, the amount of antisemitic activity in the United States has seen a sharp increase, the largest number of instances in our history, and so we've had this challenge. And it's been certainly fueled in part by Mr. Putin claiming that his war in Ukraine is to de-Nazify Ukraine, even though we know the president is Jewish. So we have these challenges and we are going to continue to work with you on all these issues. So thank you for your leadership.

And I apologized to you personally before here. I have to attend – we have our Caucus lunch that I need to be at. I'm going to excuse myself. But then I can give Senator Wicker this – the prime spot that he deserves.

WICKER: (Laughs.) I'm very comfortable here.

Mr. Chair, let me say, if I might, that this is – this is a culmination of a lot of effort. And I just want to congratulate North Macedonia on its full entry into our community. And I'm so glad that we've been able to resolve regional issues there which were a problem for you and for

us. And I wish you the very best, Mr. Foreign Minister, as – from ally to ally, in this year and as Chair-in-Office. And, Mr. Ambassador, it's wonderful to have you here. I do appreciate the remarks of the chairman and our co-chairman.

And indeed, we are shoulder to shoulder on a bipartisan basis when it comes to the principles of the OSCE, and enforcing them, and shining light on some of the challenges we have – the most serious of which, of course, is Vladimir Putin's illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine. It matters to our friends in North Macedonia. It matters to citizens of the United States of America. It matters to every member of the OSCE.

And I would note that when Vladimir Putin, the war criminal, says he wants the collapse of Western hegemony, he means the power of your country, and our country, and our allies. So there's no question that the world is watching. There's no question that folks in the Indo-Pacific area are watching as China makes a mockery of OSCE principles underfoot. And we continue to work with you, Mr. Chair.

Other issues will be secondarily, as Senator Cardin mentioned, very important to antisemitism, religious freedom, government corruption, free press, the continued problem in Europe of human trafficking. So but let me just say thank you so much. As an elected vice president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I am quite mindful of the prominence that our announcements and statements receive in Europe. And I want to thank you for taking on this task for the coming year.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Senator.

And Congresswoman Spartz, would you like to make any opening comment?

SPARTZ: Well, thank you so much. And it's nice – (inaudible). But it is my honor to represent our great country, and it is my privilege to be – (inaudible) – but it's also very much honored to represent our Congress on global security. So I look forward to bringing my personal and professional experiences to ensure that we bring peace and stability back to Europe. And – (inaudible) – it's very important to say what is happening there is unacceptable, and the cost in human lives is so much.

So I appreciate your strong bipartisan support, bicameral support, so many kinds. And I appreciate it on behalf of the American people and also on behalf of – (inaudible).

WILSON: Thank you very much.

Senator Blumenthal.

BLUMENTHAL: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Like Senator Cardin, I have another obligation, but I just wanted to say it's important to bring peace and stability to Europe, and make sure that we observe the rule of law and the world order against the savage, brutal Russian attacks, but also to hold accountable for crimes against humanity all who have committed them.

And I have been working with the Ukrainian prosecutor. I've traveled to Ukraine three times over the last roughly last year. And I've been working with a number of my colleagues, both sides of the aisle, to provide support for the prosecutor in Ukraine, so as to make sure that there is accountability in a European tribunal for the ICC. So your work as the Chairman of this organization will be very, very important to get at that work. As Chairman of the OSCE, you can really play a very important role in ensuring accountability. And I thank you for all your work.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Senator.

And we are joined by a brand-new freshman this year, Congressman Mike Lawler, all the way from New York.

LAWLER: Thank you, Chairman. It's great to be here with you and my colleagues – (inaudible) – bipartisan, bicameral Commission.

We are certainly at a point in history where I think this Commission will play a pivotal role in the coming months, especially in dealing with the crisis in Ukraine. As the chairman knows, my wife is from Moldova. Family is – still lives there. And so on a personal level – (inaudible) – interest in the crisis there and making sure that it is brought to swift resolution.

I am very concerned that if Vladimir Putin is allowed to succeed in Ukraine, he will not stop there. And the Ukrainian people deserve our support. The Ukrainian government deserves our support. So this is – we're going to be dealing with a lot of work. I'm proud to be part of this Commission, but also to be a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House to work in tandem with you on these sorts of issues. So I just wanted to thank you for your leadership in stepping forward at such a pivotal time in the world.

WILSON: Yes, indeed. Thank you very much, Congressman. And one indication of the appreciation we have for Central and Eastern Europe is the people serving in Congress.

With this, Foreign Minister, we're very happy to hear your presentation. And again, to the Chairman-in-Office, Bujar Osmani.

OSMANI: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair and members of the Commission. Thank you for the warm welcome. Congratulations on your new position as the chair of the Helsinki Commission. We are both new chairs and I am looking forward to working with all of you.

WILSON: So we've got good leadership.

OSMANI: I am grateful for the opportunity and it is my honor to address you today to discuss North Macedonia's Chairpersonship of the OSCE – as you said, in a time of war. And indeed, we are living in a time of war and conflicts and unprecedented turmoil and continuous tension across the OSCE.

The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine is a blow to European and human security. The international rules-based order and multilateral architecture are designed to ensure peace, stability and cooperation. And again, it is the pleasure of North Macedonia to assume the Chairpersonship of the OSCE. So it's not going to be easy to steer this OSCE ship in these stormy waters, but you can rest assured that we are navigating toward only one direction and this is the principles and commitments that the OSCE enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act.

The OSCE was first and foremost designed as a platform for dialogue in order to build trust and confidence among – and cooperation among - the participating states. However, in the OSCE, trust and confidence have been shattered. The violation of the agreed Helsinki Final Act commitments not only jeopardizes our dialogue and day-to-day interaction, but it erodes the trust which is the foundation of our organization. And of course, this affects our deliberations and deliverables. It affects our way of doing business. And it blocks the utility and efficacy – of that – of that business.

But this is – this has not started from the 24th of February. In fact, we have reached this terrible juncture due to the incremental disrespecting of our agreed commitments. And this dynamic only reached its peak when the Russian Federation launched its full-scale war against Ukraine, which immediately exacerbated an already complex landscape. So the dilemmas we face as Chairpersonship today are real and difficult. One, how can we foster political will and dialogue in a time of open war? Two, how can we engage with a participating State that nominally supports European security, but uses weaponized politics of coercion and dominance? And three, how we can serve as a honest broker – this is what is expected from us as Chairpersonship-in-Office – in the face of blatant disregard of the founding principles of this organization?

There is one answer, one logical and relevant answer lies in sticking to the principles and commitments of the OSCE, their urgent restoration as the foundation of the European security and cooperation, and the recognition of their merits – a necessity for all participating States. Under North Macedonia's leadership, the OSCE aspires to achieve these ambitions above all else. So, in order to foster meaningful dialogue, Russia's aggression against Ukraine must end. Only then we can engage in credible confidence-building exercises.

Last week, on the 24th of February, it was the anniversary for already one year ago that the Russian Federation has chosen to completely disregard the core founding principles of the OSCE and launched its unprovoked full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine. This unjustified act has not only inflicted devastating damage on Ukraine and visited untold horror and suffering on the people of Ukraine on a scale not seen since World War II, it also undermines the European security architecture.

My first visit as OSCE Chairman-in-Office was to Ukraine. In Kyiv, I met with President Zelensky and other Ukrainian officials to express OSCE's full support to the country. This was a symbolic, yet clear signal that Ukraine will be a top priority for our Chairpersonship. Providing support to Ukraine's people is our primary goal, and we will improve the operationalization and implementation of activities of the Support Program for Ukraine.

And then last week we organized a reinforced meeting of the Permanent Council where we again sent a strong message that we are firmly committed to the OSCE guiding principles. I condemn any form of aggression as means to an end and again urge the Russian Federation to immediately stop this war, withdraw its troops from Ukraine, recommit to the principles and values of the OSCE and to diplomacy.

However, inside Ukraine this aggression has had a detrimental impact on other difficult questions which we are demanding to deal with as an organization. So it affects our engagement in Eastern Europe, in the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and Western Balkans. It affects the performance of our field missions, one of the OSCE's unique platforms. It obstructs our ability to implement a positive agenda for the institution and to engage proactively in the search for durable solutions, critical for pan-European security, stability, and prosperity.

Two weeks ago – since the congressman mentioned Moldova – I visited Moldova and met with the leadership of the country and stakeholders from both banks of the Dniester River. The OSCE is fully aware of the challenges that Moldova faces, particularly in regards to the war of aggression in Ukraine. Moldova still hosts a large number of refugees from Ukraine. And praising the efforts of the whole society, I witnessed firsthand the incredible work of many young volunteers providing essential support to the refugees. We are focused particularly on the Transnistrian settlement process. I underline that this vital process is a priority for our Chairpersonship and the 5+2 format is important. We urge continuation of the meetings so the chief negotiators of the so-called 1+1 format and the working groups in order to sustain confidence-building efforts. Even I offered to facilitate the dialogue and organize a conference in a respective format in Skopje to expand the space for positive dynamic.

In the South Caucasus, with protracted conflict and periodical incidents along the borders of different parties remain a serious concern. The recent negative development along the Lachin corridor also demonstrates the fragility and the risks escalating at any given moment.

Georgia appears high on our agenda. The security situation along the administrative boundary lines is generally calm but the potential for escalation remains.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine complicates the state of play in Central Asia. Domestic fragilities are being exacerbated.

Different triggers and influences create increased tension in southeastern Europe. And we should find a way to address the outstanding issue across the region to preserve stability, ensure its durability, and boost predictability.

And as a NATO member state, North Macedonia, an inclusive, functional, multiethnic democracy, will contribute to regional stability. Combatting corruption and promoting good governance are on our list of priorities for the region, as it is a common foe that endangers democratic and socio-economic growth. And we are working to reinvigorate the anti-corruption agenda as it deepens social inequalities and erodes trust and is a prerequisite for conflict.

Your Commission is truly a success story, that 50 years after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act we lack the occasion to celebrate this milestone. The pillars of our Organization are critically undermined. Its very core, everything that the OSCE stands for has been belittled and challenged.

However, our Organization demonstrates the crucial resilience and flexibility to adapt against these imposed circumstances, continuing to assist when so requested. And one example I've already mentioned is the Support Program for Ukraine, which strongly underpins this statement. So there are many important things the OSCE could do in a time of war, but even more in time of peace. And I remain convinced that the OSCE, through its unique, comprehensive concept of security and its versatile toolbox in conflict prevention, management, and post-conflict rehabilitation still has a lot to offer.

Allow me to reaffirm that we won't back down. We cannot and we will not accept what is happening. We are determined and we will continue to proactively seek areas for positive engagement. I thank you, and I'm at your disposal for any specific questions with regard to the OSCE region and our Organization. Thank you so much.

WILSON: Chairman in person, what an honor to be again here again with you.

And Senator Wicker has a schedule issue, and so I want him to be first, which I'm happy to do because I am just so happy for his leadership.

WICKER: Well, thank you.

Let me just echo the importance of speaking out, as you're doing today. We don't have any law enforcement ability. The OSCE doesn't have tanks. And to members who've not been on the Commission until now, it is – it strikes me continuously how much attention is paid to us across the Atlantic. And so the fact that you are here today with a senior member of the Armed Services Committee, with a senior – with two – with, I guess, four, now, members of the House and very senior and respected member of the Foreign Relations Committee, does speak volumes. And we do know that people in Moscow are listening to this also. And so we appreciate the show of solidarity.

Do you see any weakening of resolve among your neighbors? Is there anything we can do to make sure that we – that we don't let up on the pressure that we've put on Putin's Russia for this illegal act of war, of criminality?

OSMANI: Well, first of all, I thank you for the kind words and for the support you gave me. I was asked whether as Chairman-in-Office I will try to be an honest broker between all

participating States (inaudible) and Russia. And my response was simply that I can – we cannot be an honest broker between respecting and breaching the principles and commitments of the joint foundation of the Organization. So we have –

WICKER: Well said.

OSMANI: We have named the aggressor. We have condemned the aggressor. And we have asked immediately to stop this aggression and to recommit to the principles that we have all voluntarily and with unanimity committed as participating States when we created this Organization.

As you said, we don't have military means. But we do have a unique toolbox and expertise on all cycles of conflicts, and we can employ this expertise to help people on the ground. And as you have noticed, the motto of our chairpersonship – of North Macedonia's chairpersonship – it's about people – says it's important to emphasize the role of the OSCE on the ground. There is a perceived distance between what's happening in Vienna, Hofburg, and what OSCE is doing with its field operations on the ground.

And I have been visiting field missions since the first day of my Chairpersonship, starting from Skopje. By the way, Skopje, the first field missions ever opened since Western Balkans sort of provided this regional impetus for the OSCE to create this field operation –. I visited Moldova, I was in Kyiv. And it's really impressive what OSCE is doing on the ground for the benefit of the people and it is important that we sustain this organization in these stormy, stormy times.

I don't think we can influence the outcome of the war, but surely we can alleviate the suffering of the people. We are not present at the moment in Ukraine because Russia's has used its veto power to block our presence, but we have found a way to show resilience by introducing an extra-budgetary-funded initiative to go back to Ukraine and to support Ukraine. I appointed myself a special representative for Ukraine, who will sort of serve as a temporary head of mission in Ukraine. We found a way of re-establishing ourself in Ukraine.

So it's important, as I said, that we have this support in the Helsinki Commission, from the United States in these difficult times for the Organization. Many have predicted its demise because of the blockage – reinforced blockage in the OSCE. But regardless of what – how the war in Ukraine is going we need to preserve the organization for the sake of the work it's doing now and for its future role when and if the war will stop.

WICKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Senator.

And indeed, to me, it's a dream come true to be here with you. And so, Mr. Minister, Chairman-in-Person and Ambassador, in high school I was active in political organizations with the political theory of: Why not victory? Meaning victory over totalitarians and victory of liberty for the people of Central and Eastern Europe. And so – and you – now you're going to

see – you are here, but then we have the extraordinary example of Congresswoman Spartz from Ukraine, now serving in Congress; and Congressman Lawler’s wife in Moldova; my daughter-in-law, is Polish American. Hey, we’re – it’s really a remarkable time in history.

And that’s why I’m still an optimist. We’ve gone from a conflict, actual, with a totalitarian ideology, to now it’s my concern that we’re in a worldwide competition globally. We have democracies with rule of law being opposed by authoritarians with rule of gun. And so people need to make a choice, but I’m just hopeful that they will.

And we see the resolve of the people of Ukraine and how inspiring that is. And also, I think it gives – it’s a deterrence to the Chinese Communist Party looking at conquest of Taiwan. It’s a deterrence to Tehran, who somehow visualized the vaporization of the people of Israel, and by building ICBMs to attack the United States. And so, it’s so important, I believe, with OSCE’s success and support, that the authoritarians see the victory of Ukraine as indication that they should not proceed.

With that in mind, Congresswoman Spartz is going to go first because she’s going to go vote. And we’re in - you’ve never seen somebody run so fast. And she – (laughter) – and so – but she’s going to go vote, and then I’m going to go vote and then come back. And so this is – hey, I am confident this is – in every parliamentary system, there’s always competing meetings. But, bottom line, Congresswoman Spartz.

SPARTZ: Thank you so much. And as the senator mentioned, that, you know, the OSCE doesn’t have tanks, but a lot of member states do have a lot of tanks. (Laughs.) So that’s important, you know.

But I wanted to ask you, since I’m new to this – you know, also to this Commission, and you’re also a new Chairman-in-Office. So sometimes it’s good for someone new to assess. What I would like to see, how we can make – you know, because a lot of – you know, I’ve been a legislator for some time. We do different resolutions, proclamations, different things. But how can we have an action plan, from your perspective? How we can be helpful to your action plan, that we actually will have, you know, that mechanism, you know, in Europe and around the world that we can restore peace and hold countries, aggressors, accountable? So I don’t know if you’ve thought about that plan. Maybe you can share with us some things that we could be helpful in, that might –

OSMANI: Well, thank you. Thank you for your question. I can talk in my capacity as Chair-in-Office of the – of the OSCE.

It’s important that we – as I said, we preserve the functionality of the OSCE in these difficult times because of its unique expertise and the capacities that the OSCE has developed throughout the – throughout the years. We don’t have a mandate on the issues of accountability, but we do have mechanisms to assist our international organizations and pursue – (inaudible).

This is not a period for business as usual in the OSCE. Obviously, OSCE’s a consensus-based organization where all the decisions are made by consensus, which means that all 57

participating States should approve any decision of the – of the OSCE. And at the moment, we are seeing, as I said, reinforced blockages throughout the OSCE process, which is affecting the development of the organization. There are some critical decisions that are coming this year, and without consensus the OSCE might face – it might jeopardize its whole – its whole function. Therefore, I think, even in these unprecedented times, the role of our Chairpersonship is to sustain the organization, to maintain its functionality, and get it ready for its particular role after the – peace just needs to be restored in order to use and employ its instruments to help people on the ground.

SPARTZ: Any particular priorities you have as a new Chairman-in-Office?

OSMANI: Well, the motto of our chairpersonship is “It’s About People.” So our focus will be on the field operations of the organization and the benefits people have found in the work of the OSCE.

Ukraine is our key security priority. It is the overarching priority of our – of our Chairpersonship. But certainly we will not lose focus on other protracted conflicts, since also there is a potential there as well - the war in Ukraine to have an effect – in exacerbating those conflicts. But other programmatic activities of the OSCE, which are particularly important for the human dimension of the comprehensive security – of OSCE’s comprehensive concept of security - its economic and environmental dimension and we will try to proceed in this situation.

SPARTZ: Thank you. (Inaudible.) (Laughs.)

WILSON: Thank you. (Inaudible.)

And, again, I have to tell you, it’s so inspiring to be with you. And to – and I am so happy for you, whether you be called minister or Chairman-in-Person. And, Ambassador, again, it’s just a dream come true to be here at present. And it’s so important, and hey, to see North Macedonia get this recognition from the world. And so, congratulations. And you’re, like, so many situations with the challenges that we have in the West Balkans, the challenges of the Caucasus, the challenges of the countries of Central Asia. And then the overall Ukraine threat from the Baltic republics, to Poland, to Romania, to Moldova, Georgia.

With all of that, a perspective that I would like from you is – back to the West Balkans – what can we do to continue the level of stability that has been achieved and what can we do to promote more?

OSMANI: Well, Mr. Chairman, the Western Balkans has come a long way in the last two to three decades, from a region stuck in war trenches into an attempt to build a common regional market. And this is huge progress that the region has achieved.

Certainly, there are vulnerabilities. The vulnerabilities that are stemming from the important parts, parts like Bosnia and Herzegovina and – and its difficulties in functionality of the – of the state. The open issue between Kosovo and Serbia, fortunately, yesterday there was substantial progress made that we commend, and we welcome.

But also, the slow pace of the European consolidation of the region has created frustration among citizens that – thus, providing fertile ground for different malign influences in the region. So it's important that this region continues its peacetime reconciliation, reforms, and European integration, and that it strengthen its (inaudible) institutions. And certainly OSCE, with its six field operations in the Western Balkan countries, can be of real help.

WILSON: I'm happy to hear about the recent developments with Serbia and Kosovo. I just – we were grateful February 15th to recognize Serbia National Day. And so, over and over again, there is every effort to work with your neighbors. And but – and so any way that any of us, and to back you up at OSCE to promote the stability.

And then I'm going to show my age, and I don't want the young people here to hear, but I – when I was in college, I obviously needed to get a life, but I used to listen to Radio Tirana. And so it was the outpost of Maoism in Europe. And it was critical of the imperfect Soviet Union. I mean, it was just – but, hey, and now to meet people Tirana, meet people from the region, is just – again, it's a dream come true because it's a far cry from Enver Hoxha with this.

And back to the Caucasus. Indeed, it's countries that should be doing so well – Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Georgia in between. What do you see that we can all be doing to promote stability there, and reconciliation (inaudible)?

OSMANI: I think it's important that we remain focused on Armenia-Azerbaijan relations. Actually, that was my first engagement as the Chair-in-Office. I spoke with ministers – (inaudible) – consequences. And my next stop after Moldova and Washington will be Armenia and Azerbaijan, to try to encourage confidence-building and communication between both countries. So it is high in our agenda, and our focus – (inaudible).

WILSON: Well, that's encouraging. And, indeed, I think to me a country that's come to life – excuse me – in the region is Central Asia and the Stans, with the mineral wealth they have, with the cultural wealth they have, with – and how promising that is.

And then – I got a problem. I need to run to a vote. And so but thank goodness we have Victoria Spartz. So I shall –

SPARTZ: No trouble. (Laughs.)

WILSON: And she's going to memorize everything that you say. But I'll be back as soon as I vote, so.

SPARTZ: We've got two votes.

WILSON: Yes, yes. And so, Central Asia.

SPARTZ: Yeah, OK. Thank you so much. So I'll try to pick up. So you know where I should pick up, so you guide this through.

WILSON: Yeah. We need two votes.

SPARTZ: Right? But I think, you know, just if we prioritized top three issues we discussed, you know, like new Chairman, so what issues? So one is going to be Ukraine. What other issues would kind of be your top three issues?

OSMANI: So one is Ukraine.

Second is protracted conflicts (inaudible).

And third is keeping the organization functional, since these are – the organization is going through hard times. And this will be particularly emphasized during this year, when we are going to face the critical decisions that will require consensus. The organization has no budget approved. We might face the issue of the leadership vacuum at the end of – at the end of the year if there is no consensus achieved. And we have already – the Permanent Council only approved a partial extension of our mission in Moldova. So there are some serious challenges for the organization.

And surely this will consume most of our energy as the Chairpersonship, instead of focusing on the priorities that we have envisaged in our priority agenda. But being aware of the unprecedented times in the Organization, it is – I think it's important that we maintain the functionality while we keep our focus on Ukraine and the protracted conflicts. So there is no business as usual.

We started our Chairpersonship with a conference devoted to antisemitism. There will be other conferences on different issues that are within the mandate of the OSCE. But the Ukraine issue will have an impact or will define the tone of all conferences and issues that the Organization will work on in 2023.

SPARTZ: So crisis, you know, I mean, it's a challenge, but sometimes also crises bring opportunities to improve some things – you know, look at maybe some things you could do better. If you look at all the strategies, especially number three, what do you believe needs to happen to make it a more effectively functional institution? Something may be revisiting rules, procedures – anything, you are much more familiar. From your perspective, what should we maybe discuss?

OSMANI: Well, as Chairpersonship, we are just - we are just trying to bring together 56 participating states. It's all about their willingness to engage. It's about their will to compromise, to maintain this dialogue in which the common ground – (inaudible) – on different issues. We will certainly provide a platform for this dialogue, for this communication. But in the end, it's all – it's all up to the participating States and their commitment to support the work of the Organization, and through that to support 1.3 billion people which are represented in the – in the Organization.

SPARTZ: OK. What about the threat of conflicts? Any specific things you believe can be done better to – you know, to really deal with some of these situations?

OSMANI: All protracted conflicts have their own specifics. In Moldova, as I mentioned, we have the challenge of having a partial extension of the mandate of the field operation of the OSCE, which is happening for the first time if we exclude what happened in Ukraine. So there is unpredictability around the work of the OSCE on the ground, which is so important and has been instrumental throughout the years in maintaining peace and stability in Moldova and to continue – to continue the process of communication, dialogue, and negotiations within the Transnistria settlement process.

We have the Western Balkans with its own specific needs, Central Asia as well, Armenia-Azerbaijan. And so it's important that we can – (inaudible) – the war in Ukraine, where the potential for escalation in all of these latent and protracted conflicts is hard to maintain our focus and employ our instruments in order to alleviate tension and to boost predictability.

SPARTZ: So in one sense you may be, you know, underutilized, which instruments could be utilized maybe more effectively in these conflicts or in Ukraine. Any of these field operations could be improved. I've spent my life – (laughs) – making improvement in the real world, which is not the political world. There is such a lack of strategic thinking in the political world and a commitment to results. So sometimes, you know, that's, like, created all these conflicts, because no one has really strong leadership to actually get done something, and results delivered.

So in a lot of institutions there's a lot of talk. I'll be honest with you; I don't even go to a lot of CODELs anymore – a lot of meetings from morning till night and dinners. And as a result, people leave and we have another meeting. And we have some serious situation(s) around the world.

So how maybe we can work? And I just – you know, I just throw it to you to answer right now how we can make more effectiveness of a lot of institutions, because a lot of institutions enter resolutions, TV speeches, and people are dying. They have serious conflicts around the world. And really, the situation is not going in the right direction in global security in general.

So I wanted to get – you know, you don't have to answer now – but maybe just think through stuff. Where could we make improvements on mechanism and operation? Maybe communication. Maybe better communicate and educate, because there are some people – small group of people involved in these issues, even including in the Congress. But a lot of people are not very familiar and deep inside of these conflicts and countries.

So, I mean, most people didn't know – (laughs) – there is difference between Ukraine and Russia, I'll be honest with you, until recently, you know. So I think – even in my country here. So I think – I know there is some sort of communication could be there, or other things. If you could think – and you don't have to answer now, I think – and see how we can be helpful, you know, from my side, commit to help on that too.

OSMANI: Well, you know, we had developed and prepared a very comprehensive, forward-looking agenda for our Chairpersonship. That was before 24th of February happened. So, as I said – and I am repeating myself – this is not a year for business as usual for the OSCE. These are extraordinary times, when the very substance, the core functions of the organizations, are being jeopardized.

So this is the balance we need to strike between change of functionality of the Organization and maintaining the ongoing activities, mainly with the field operations across the OSCE region. We will spare no effort to push forward this agenda. But, as I said, in the end it will be all about the participating States' will to support the objectives of the Organization, which they have and we have voluntarily committed to uphold.

SPARTZ: Just to pick up, so the Chairman doesn't get upset with me, but with Central Asia, what specific issues do you see maybe to give more attention? Because a lot of times we are concentrating on Europe, but there are a lot of challenges that are interconnected that happen in that region.

OSMANI: Well, in Central Asia we have five field operations in all five participating States in Central Asia. So we, through our field operations, are in close communication with the government, the civil society, the people. So they know best what are the needs of these countries for the OSCE to engage.

Certainly, there have been consequences from the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and its repercussion on the Central Asian countries. Climate change is particularly a problem in this part of the world. And the OSCE, with its expertise, is working across dimensions to help governments and to help the people in Central Asia. Certainly, it's in and on my agenda to visit soon, before the summer, all five participating States in Central Asia.

SPARTZ: Well, keep us posted (inaudible) because we have a lot of members, if we can be helpful, you know, because that is one area that probably most of us do not travel. (Laughs.) But a very important area. And I think we need to do probably sometimes maybe a better presence and engagements on that.

OSMANI: Thank you. Thank you so much for the – (inaudible). Thank you.

SPARTZ: Anything else we have? You know, we're waiting for the congressman to be back to conclude it, or?

OSMANI: Thank you. Thank you so much.

SPARTZ: OK. Well, thank you so much. Thank you for being here.

Do we call it adjourned? I have to use the gavel? (Sounds gavel.) (Laughter.) Officially. OK.

[Whereupon, at 1:52 p.m., the hearing ended.]