

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

“Sweden’s Leadership of the OSCE”

Committee Members Present:

**Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), Chairman;
Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS), Co-Chairman;
Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member;
Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN);
Representative Emanuel Cleaver, II (D-MO);
Representative Gwen Moore (D-WI)**

Witness:

Ann Linde, Swedish Foreign Minister and OSCE Chairperson-in-Office

**The Hearing Was Held From 9:18 a.m. To 10:27 a.m. via Videoconference,
Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), Chairman, Commission for Security and
Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

Date: Friday, June 11, 2021

CARDIN: (In progress) – Commission and as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's special rep on anti-Semitism, racism, and intolerance. I work to ensure that our human rights practices here at home align with the international commitments we have signed onto, including the OSCE. I'm therefore greatly troubled with the same month we commemorated the death of George Floyd, who sparked a global movement to address all forms of racism and adopted a bill to address the more than 6,600 hate crimes that have targeted Asian Americans, we also saw a rise in anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiments and violence throughout the OSCE region in response to the Middle East tensions. I look forward to working with you on ways that the OSCE can strengthen its efforts to address hate crimes.

At the same time, the OSCE participating states and the OSCE itself are working to overcome a global pandemic. Several OSCE states either continue to grossly violate the OSCE commitments or are backsliding on respect for human rights. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been at the center of the OSCE's focus for many years now. And I welcome your strong commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Belarus continues to target independent media and human rights activists. The kidnapping from a commercial aircraft, illegally forced by military aircraft to land in Minsk, creates a precedent of terror that, if unchecked, could limit dissidents' ability to travel freely and has broad and frightening implications, even beyond the OSCE region.

I'm also concerned that Turkey appears to be conducting covert rendition of persons I believes have connections to the Gülen Movement. Several OSCE states including Russia, Belarus and Turkey are blocking OSCE work in the human dimension in an apparent effort to avoid criticism of their own poor human rights records and undermine civil society in participation of OSCE events.

I would also like to stress the importance of fighting corruption. And I hope the OSCE can step up its efforts on this regard. President Biden recently declared that countering corruption is a core U.S. national security interest. There is no doubt in my mind that corruption poses an essential threat to democracy. Senator Wicker and I have introduced legislation in the Senate that would strengthen our resolve to fight corruption by using funding to help our missions deal with corruption globally. I've also introduced legislation on a bipartisan basis to establish a rating system similar to what we do with human trafficking, to have a global effort to deal with the rise of corruption.

So you have a full plate, a lot to do. And I just want you to know that the Helsinki Commission supports your mission, and we – as you have stated, your priorities in: Addressing unresolved conflicts, particularly in Ukraine; promoting freedom of expression and freedom of the media, critically important; supporting civil society's participation, which is under attack today; arms control, modernization of the Vienna Document, which is desperately needed particularly as it relates to transparency; and supporting the OSCE autonomous institutions which have been under threat by certain states' participation in the OSCE.

So we look forward to your exchange today. And we look forward as to how we can help you. And with that, I'm going to yield to my colleague and friend, Senator Wicker.

You're on mute.

WICKER: I think what happened is we were having a practice session where we could be heard – (laughter) – and then we technically moved over to the official session. Thank you so much, Chairman Cardin. And welcome, Foreign Minister Linde. We're joined now by Congressman Joe Wilson.

Let me say how much I appreciate sharing this duty and responsibility with Chairman Cardin. And let me say that I agree with and subscribe to every single word and sentence he said in his opening statement. There is a great deal of importance in what we do. This is a wonderful tradition that the Helsinki Commission has had for years and years with the chair in office. And we continue it virtually today but, as Chairman Cardin says, we're going to see so many of our friends that are longstanding and make some new friends from the OSCE in just a few weeks when we return to Vienna.

Peace and prosperity in the OSCE region rests on respect for human rights and preservation of fundamental freedoms, democratic principles, and economic liberty. At a time when civil society is under threat in so many countries, we look to you as chair in office to ensure that peoples' voices are heard in the OSCE. There are – there are troubling spots that need to be attention – that need to be paid attention to. And various members of the Parliamentary Assembly will be heard on these issues. And I hope the OSCE as a whole will address them.

Violations of OSCE commitments. Russia, for example, has attempted to redefine European borders through force. In Belarus, President Lukashenko has rigged elections and stooped to another alarming low by using military aircraft to force down a civilian airline. So we have things to talk about and things that we will heard about. Chairman Cardin is correct to mention anti-Semitism. I would also point out restrictions on freedom of religion in the OSCE. In April, together with Jeanne Shaheen, I reintroduced bipartisan Ukraine Religious Freedom Support Act.

So we're talking about these things in the Senate. I know Mr. Wilson would agree that we're talking about things like that in the Congress as a whole. And we'll be talking about them in the Parliamentary Assembly. The joint evaluation bill done on the OSCE ODIHR and the Venice Commission has been very, very important.

So thank you all for participating in this. It is an important event that we look forward to and we try to emphasize each year. And I strongly endorse this. And I cannot tell you, Madam Foreign Minister, how delighted we are to hear from you at this point. And I'll yield back to Senator Cardin.

CARDIN: Our lead Republican in the House of Representatives is Congressman Wilson. He's been a very active member of the Helsinki Commission. Congressman Wilson.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Senator. And, Minister Linde, Senators, good afternoon in Europe, good morning in America. The past year has – and half – been unpredictable and challenging as we've worked to overcome the global pandemic. In addition, we appreciate so much the late Chairman Alcee Hastings for his extraordinary OSCE service. At the same time, countries in the OSCE region have continued to deal with other security challenges, including the ongoing conflicts such as Ukraine. In recent months, there have been concerns about human rights violations in Belarus and the Russian Federation, along with occupation of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia.

What this shows is that we need the OSCE both to assist with solutions and help hold governments accountable for sometimes flagrant human rights violations. We also need the OSCE to place – on a place to engage, even while we do not see eye-to-eye with another country. The OSCE has helped build democratic institutions in former communist countries, such as Bulgaria and Slovakia. And that's special to me, Minister Linde. It was 31 years ago yesterday – or, day before yesterday, that I was an election observer for the first elections in Bulgaria. And to see that country come to life, how exciting it is. And I haven't gotten over it yet. Obviously, Senator Wicker understands that I'm just still so excited for the opportunity to participate in it, and then to see the success. And now to see that Slovakia and Bulgaria are NATO and EU members.

And the OSCE continues to assist other countries that have not yet made the successful transition. That is so important. I also appreciate the broad focus of OSCE activities, which include many common global challenges that I believe are a priority, such as Senator Cardin has identified, with combatting human trafficking, tackling corruption, and counter violence extremism. Sweden's stated priorities for the leadership including many of these same priorities, your theme of back to basics, which you define as defending the European security order, upholding OSCE's comprehensive concept of security, and contributing to resolving conflicts in accordance with international law. I would like to add particular respect for the OSCE's fundamental principles, including respect for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

I look forward to, Minister Linde, your comments on these issues as well as some other important issues high on the Commission's agenda now. We would certainly include the struggle of the people of Belarus to decide their own future and the crackdown of the Lukashenko regime and response. I also have great concern about Russian aggression in Ukraine and against other neighbors, including Moldova and Georgia, as well as how China might influence vulnerable regions of Europe and Eurasia. With this, I wish you best wishes for the continued success and honored to be working with my Senate colleagues.

Also Congressman Steve Cohen has appeared. So this is a real honor, all the way from Memphis. Thank you.

CARDIN: We can tell that Congressman Cohen is in Tennessee, since there's sunshine behind him coming in through his screen. Congressman Cohen is the – is a member of the House. We have two Democrats, two Republicans on his call. Congressman Cohen.

You're on mute.

COHEN: Thank you, Chairman Cardin. It's nice to be with you, and nice to be with our friends from Sweden. In fact, when I came in this morning I had – this little horse came and said hello. (Laughter.) There's a little one here and I've got a big one in my living room. I really enjoyed Sweden when I visited on the two occasions. The Swedes are great allies of America for many, many years. And beautiful people, a wonderful country. And I look forward to your leadership of the OSCE. The OSCE holds our most important ideals for America. Sometimes we don't – (inaudible, technical difficulties) – we are trying to participate in all the ways that we should, defending human rights and opposing human trafficking.

Concerned about areas where Russia's been involved with Moldova, and Georgia and, of course, Ukraine, and Belarus where Mr. Lukashenko has put his powerful personality and powerful spirit over the people of Belarus and their beautiful spirit. Freedom is something that's hard to repress, and he's done an outstanding job of repressing it. But the people's spirit needs to rise up and the Belarusian people need to have the freedom that they've shown and the rights that they desire and need. We visited there – I visited there several times. And the people are beautiful. They want freedom, and they don't have it.

But anyway, I look forward to the coming year working with you and trying to see that we defend and work with our European allies in being a bulwark against aggression from Russia in so many different ways. And with that, I yield back the balance of my time.

CARDIN: Thank you. We are also joined by Congressman Cleaver. Congressman Cleaver, do you want to make any opening comments? Thank you.

Ann Linde is the chair in office and the Swedish foreign minister. Also serves as Sweden's minister for European Union affairs and trade, as well as the state secretary of ministry for home affairs. She has been the Swedish Social Democratic Party's international secretary and board member of Olof Palme International Center. So she's had a busy career in Swedish politics, and is now our leader on the OSCE. It's a pleasure to have you with us. The floor is yours.

LINDE: Thank you very much. And thank you for your warm welcome, including a Dalahäst that the – (laughs) – that this horse is. Well, Mr. Chairman and members of United States Helsinki Commission, Senators, and members of the Congress, it's a great honor for me to address you today.

When Sweden decided to take the role of chair of the OSCE, we did so well-aware that the organization was going through a difficult period unlikely to improve soon. Old rivalries continue to pose challenges to international peace and security. New conflicts, crises, and threats demand our attention. From the security impact of climate change to cybersecurity, democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law are continuously being challenged.

We decided to take the role of chair because of the important part that the organization plays regarding security, stability, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, both in our own neighborhood and in the wider OSCE region. A well-functioning OSCE is in our own interest,

but we firmly believe that it's also in the interest of all the 57 participating states that makes the OSCE. We value multilateralism and international law, because the problems of our time call for more and not less common solutions. And the transatlantic cooperation is key in this regard.

The guiding principle of the Swedish chairpersonship is to go back to basics, to return to the fundamental norms and principles on which the OSCE was founded, to which all participating states have committed and recommitted in Helsinki in 1975, in Paris in 1990, in Istanbul in '99, and Astana in 2010. Underpinning these are, of course, the U.N. charter and international law. Safeguarding these commitments on which the European security ought to rest is my first priority as chairperson in office. But it is our common task to ensure that principles such as respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, the duty to refrain from threats or use of force, and every country's right to choose its own security arrangement are respected.

My second priority is to safeguard and promote the organization's unique concept of comprehensive security, which human rights, democracy and the rule of law is at its core. There is a clear link between the freedom within states and security between states. My third priority is to see continued and strong engagement at the highest level for a sustainable solution for crisis and conflicts in the region. I want to make use of our extensive toolbox, ranging from OSCE field missions to the autonomous institutions.

At the outset of our chairpersonship, I made a commitment to personally travel to all countries that have an OSCE presence, and I have now visited most of them. It has given me a first-hand input from people in the region, including those affected by conflicts and the human rights violations and abuses. I have met civil society organizations on every visit. I have done this to ensure that their contributions inform all aspects of our efforts. I'm committed to the safeguarding of the unique role and participation of civil society organization in the OSCE meetings. This meeting has reinforced my conviction that there can be no security with respect for human rights.

This is also why we have the Women, Peace and Security agenda and gender equality as guiding theme for our chairpersonship. No part of the OSCE region, including mature democracies, are immune to the global trend of democratic backsliding and the decline in respect for human rights and the rule of law. Inclusive democratic processes, freedom of expression, and media freedom are key priorities in the human dimension. Last month we had a conference on media freedom in the OSCE region together with the OSCE representative of freedom of the media. Democracy and peace can only thrive when a plurality of views, opinions and voices are heard. We must also continue to counter all form of intolerance and discrimination.

Our first event as chair was to organize a meeting on combatting anti-Semitism in the OSCE region. I have asked Rabbi Andrew Baker, who is my personal representative on combatting anti-Semitism, to report to the Malmö Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and combatting anti-Semitism, which is the Swedish Prime Minister – he's convening this in October in Sweden. Maybe you could be there.

Let me briefly touch upon some country-specific developments in the region. Ukraine remains the most serious challenge to the European security order, and an example of violation

of our common commitments and the international law in our region. The heated rhetoric, the continuous violation of the ceasefire, and the Russian military buildup in April displayed the fragility of the situation in and around Ukraine. This is why on my first trip as OSCE chairperson in office I visited both Kyiv and the contact line in Donbas. This is also why I will return there in just a few days.

My priority as chair is to work for a sustainable political solution in line with the OSCE commitment and principles, respecting the sovereignty, the territorial integrity, and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized border. Militarization and human rights abuses in Crimea are also serious and demand our continuous attention. As chair, I have put strong emphasis on relieving the humanitarian consequences of the conflict. I have worked actively for the opening of two new checkpoints on the contact line so that the people on both sides are able to gain access to their social benefits and see their relatives.

Steps like these are important to help produce a climate necessary to achieve a politically sustainable solution to the conflict. The renewed outbreak of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in South Caucasus last year resulted in thousands of casualties and immense suffering. The recent tensions along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan demonstrates that the outstanding issues remain a serious challenge to international peace and security. The need for de-escalation and dialogue for both sides to recommit to talks on a sustainable political solution in accordance with the international law, and to address humanitarian needs as well as the human rights situation, this is urgent.

It is essential to get the parties engaged in a diplomatic solution, to remaining challenges, and to renew efforts towards a lasting peace agreement. I have clearly expressed my belief that the process led by the OSCE Minsk Group cochairs, including the United States, is the best vehicle to resolve these issues. I fully support the efforts of the cochairs and my personal representative to the conflict. I'm convinced that the OSCE's role is crucial for the regional development of the whole of the South Caucasus, including Georgia. But Georgia and Moldova are clear examples of the ongoing challenges to the European security order in the OSCE area. No effort should be spared in finding solutions that is sustainable to these conflicts.

I extremely – I am extremely concerned by the developments in Belarus, like many of you have touched upon. Most recently I was appalled by the Belarusian authorities' reckless and dangerous diversion of a civilian plane for the purpose of arresting a journalist. I have called for the immediate and unconditional release of Roman Protasevich and Sophia Sapega, along with all others who have been arbitrarily detained. As chairperson of the OSCE, I continue to call on Belarus to respect their OSCE commitments and obligations under international law, and also supporting efforts to follow up the recommendations of the Moscow mechanism report on Belarus that was presented to OSCE Permanent Council last year.

We are in contact with representatives of the Belarusian society and the civil society. Confidence and security-building measures, like the Vienna Document and the Treaty on Open Skies, are important elements of the security architecture and play a crucial role in providing transparency and predictability. We have worked hard in Vienna to resolve the issue related to the implementation of the Open Sky Treaty. And we had hoped that the United States would

choose to rejoin it. The U.S. was an important party to the treaty, and I regretted to see you leave. Russia has now signaled that they too will withdraw from the treaty. Our conviction is that the OSCE region gains from more confidence and security building, not less.

I know that you share the importance that we, as the Swedish chairpersonship, attach to holding the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting this year. And rest assured that we are sparing no efforts to convening the HDIM, with its unique civil society participation. Together with ODIHR and Poland, we are working on the format that would allow for a maximum physical attendance, while respecting the COVID-19 restrictions. I would also like to highlight the important role played by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and to all personally as members. Parliamentarians bring so much to bring the reality of the OSCE cooperation home to each participating state.

Throughout your participation in election observation missions, you strengthen the connection between our organization and the more than 1 billion citizens across the 57 participating states. You also contribute to the role of OSCE when it comes to democracy and the rule of law. Thank you for this commitment and for your contributions. In the Swedish parliament, we had an OSCE debate last Wednesday, and we have many from all the eight political parties who were taking the floor and arguing in favor of different kind of OSCE achievements and activities, and challenges, and also witnessing from their participating in observation missions and the election mission, including the one to the United States.

As chairperson in office, I would do my part to defend the commitments on which the OSCE rests. When we summarize our chairpersonship in the Ministerial Council meeting in Stockholm in early December, I'm confident that I will be able to state that our efforts has made a contribution to increase dialogue, understanding and peace among the OSCE participating states. Thank you very much for inviting me to this dialogue and thank you very much for listening.

CARDIN: Well, Madam Minister, thank you for that very comprehensive report. I would give an observation then I'm going to yield to Senator Wicker for the first questions. The U.S. Helsinki Commission is truly unique. It's the implementing arm of the OSCE. It includes not only parliamentarians, but members of the executive branch. And I think there's a reason why the OSCE is the most recognized and effective regional group, institution in the world. And you mentioned that with the Parliamentary Assembly and parliamentarians' participation.

The parliamentary arm of the OSCE, the Parliamentary Assembly, allows parliamentarians to understand what is happening with the OSCE and to implement the final act and compliance. So I appreciate you mentioning that. Senator Wicker and I have taken this on and we're going to use it on the OAS, the Organization of American States, to get a stronger parliamentary participation, because we think it really does underscore the implementation of the – of our common mission. Just really want you to know we appreciate that statement and we look forward to working with you.

With that, let me turn to Senator Wicker.

WICKER: Great. And I hope that I can be heard. Thank you. Thank you very much for participating in this important hearing. We have had discussions at the Parliamentary Assembly level, at the bureau level, and among the members of the Standing Committee, and also here in the United States with the Helsinki Commission about raising the profile of OSCE. And I know that there is a – there's a large understanding among our friends in continental Europe about OSCE, but particularly about the Parliamentary Assembly. Do you have thoughts about how we can take the message of our deliberation and our adopted position papers back to not only the elected leadership in the executive branch, but also to the citizenry of our respective countries and our constituencies?

LINDE: OK. Let me start with those two. First, with Senator Cardin about the parliamentarians and how important that is. And I would say that the Parliamentary Assembly has an extremely important role. And also, when we started to plan for our chairpersonship I really, really, really put the priority to meet regularly with the parliamentarians in the Parliamentary Assembly to have their input. And I know that they are very active in relating with the parliamentarians in all the different states. And actually, the commitments of the OSCE can only take us as far as it's properly implemented. And that is actually the role of the parliaments, and also the – when it comes to the issues of democracy and the rule of law.

And when it comes to Senator Wicker, about making OSCE more visible and better understood, well, I would say that some parts are very well-known – like ODIHR, gold-standing election missions. Many, many people knows about this because after nearly every election when you see on the television they say: The OSCE observer mission said this and this. And I think that that is rather well known. We can also see that it has been more used with putting daily reports, for example, of the Ukraine monitor – special monitor mission, where the public can go in every single day and look at the reports. And also it differs very much from country to country.

I have been now in Eastern Europe, Western Balkans, South Caucasus, Central Asia. And the work there of the organization is very well known. They have offices of OSCE and they have a presence in field operations, and these bodies – these structures are very central for making OSCE well known. In other countries, there might – where the OSCE presence is not so visible, it might be less known.

It's also more and more events that are livestreamed from the OSCE. So I don't think you should livestream everything. (Laughs.) I mean, even if you look, for example, at the Permanent Council meetings, they are rather rough and tough, even if they are not public. And I think if you make them public, they would never agree on anything because some would see as they lose their face, or they are not tough enough for their own public. But many things I think we can – we can livestream.

And also, there are something I would like to increase, and that's the OSCE visitors program for students and civil society – not the least for young persons. I can tell you that this morning – early this morning we have an organization in Sweden called People and Defense. And that was – (laughs) – that was an organization that was created already during the Second World War to get broad acceptance from all organization, including trade unions, women

organization, and not the least youth organization, to understand and, well, feel like they belonged to the defense of Sweden. And this morning, all the political youth wings, they ask me for one hour all different questions on everything. (Laughs.)

And that is something I really like, to get young people to be engaged also in issues like the OSCE. It's not – I had to say, though, to say that I was acting in the youth wing during the Cold War. And then they say that, well, now never – it has never been so tough, it has never been so – you know, I had to remind them that there was actually nuclear weapons in the middle of Europe. So, yes, we have challenges, but don't forget we have had many even bigger challenges. I don't know if they appreciated that, but anyway, get more young people in. Thank you.

CARDIN: Thank you for that response. We also have been joined by Congresswoman Moore. It's nice to have you with us.

We'll go next to Congressman Wilson.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Senator Cardin. Thank you. And, Minister Linde, I'm so impressed by your determination and enthusiasm. And I think you're holding up well after being with the youth earlier today. And so I cherish that too. I'll be doing that later this morning.

With that in mind, the OSCE has been persistent, yet patient, in responding to the clear, gross, and uncorrected violations of all Helsinki principles by the Russian Federation. To me, it's very, very sad that the extraordinary people of Russia are subject to authoritarian governments. Over time, however, the OSCE may be labeled as ineffective, and it cannot slow down or effect the situation in a positive way or preventing the situation from worsening. It's particularly sad that many of us had anticipated the 21st century to be so different and to respect national sovereignty. And here we have a repeat, sadly, of what has led to such aggression and conflict in the 20th century.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea pose one of the greatest challenges to the OSCE and, as you identified also, illegal occupation of Moldova and Georgia. Russia also works to undermine the work of the human discussion. Have you – how will you address Russia's destructive behavior in the OSCE?

LINDE: It is really challenging with Russia. And actually, Russia is involved in nearly all the protracted conflicts. And of course, I mean, the biggest challenge is on – in and around Ukraine. And here, we can see that Russia is also trying to put themselves in the role of mediation instead of part of the conflict. And that's why I think it's important that we follow the commitments we have made in the Minsk agreements, and try to use the trilateral contact group with Russia, Ukraine, and OSCE to work for a sustainable solution.

There are some areas where I think it's possible to go forward with Russia on this. And that's when it comes to Moldova and the protracted conflict in Transnistria. Where I spoke to Foreign Minister Lavrov two weeks ago in Reykjavik, and he also said that it was high time to

hold a new meeting in the 5+2 format. There hasn't been one for two years. And I think that there is possibility to make maybe some small step in the right direction, but anyway.

Then we should be aware that Russia is also very active in playing a role in different areas. For example, now when it comes to Nagorno Karabakh, the truth is that it was Russia who managed to get the ceasefire that was signed between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia. And what I want to do now is not just look at the fact that there is 2,000 Russian troops on the ground, but that we need to get OSCE and the international community to play a role here, which has been very difficult. But that would be – it would be, I mean, bad and sorry for not only OSCE but the international community if we are not seen as playing a role.

And here, I really hope that the three cochairs – Russia, United States, and France – will be able to make some progress and come with some creative proposals. And I talk all the time with all my different foreign minister colleagues to try to push them in the right direction – (laughs) – when it comes to – when it comes to this. Also, in – when it comes to Georgia and what's happening there in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. There is – I think it's very disappointing that OSCE has not been able to have a mission there at all.

I visited Georgia both as foreign minister before, now as OSCE. And it's terrible what you see. I mean, it's nearly totally forgotten. And then you see there's barbed wire just going across the schoolyards and between grandchildren and grandparents. And not so many seems to care. And I think it's extremely important that we get the parties and the member countries to be active in the Geneva international dialogue, for example. And I have asked my special representative – I appointed a former vice minister state secretary of foreign affairs to be that – to try to speed up the discussions here, and don't forget it.

And finally, I just wanted to say that I think we should not forget Crimea. I mean, there is an annexation of Crimea. And it seems like some countries, or, well, politicians and so on, kind of say: Well, Crimea – we'll never get Crimea back. So why do we care about it? Let's concentrate on eastern Ukraine, and so on. I think that's a dangerous way of seeing it because that means that you annex part of another country and then after, like, 10 years, well, everybody accept the fact. And I don't think we should do that because the annexation of Crimea was a breach of the OSCE principle and commitments. And that's why there's a reason for us to put it on our agenda, and to keep it on our agenda. So if not on other issues I also would try to raise humanitarian issues in all those different conflicts that I mentioned. Thank you.

WILSON: And in conclusion, I want to thank you. I share your shock. I visited Gori, Georgia, to see the fence. In the 21st century, who would ever imagine, Senator Cardin, that something like that could occur? And then I appreciate in particular the special monitoring mission and your visit to Ukraine. And as you cite, Ukraine should never be forgotten that actually 12,000 people have died. This is not an antiseptic movement of a line or sovereignty. People have died. And so your expression of this is very positive. I yield back.

CARDIN: Well, Madam Minister, I can assure you that we strongly support that position. We will never forget Ukraine and Crimea as being part of Ukraine. We will never acknowledge the annexation. And we recognize that Russia has violated every principle of the

Helsinki Final Act. And it's part of a consensus organization, which makes our actions very challenging. But we should never, ever, ever deny what Russia is doing. We always have to be very clear that we will never accept their conduct. And we'll take actions where we can to reverse that. And we have in the Congress of the United States, with strong sanctions against the Russian Federation.

Representative Cohen.

COHEN: Thank you. Thank you, Senator.

First of all, I just want to say I appreciate all of your work, going to all of the different countries, members of the OSCE. And your travels are impressive. You're obviously doing your job in a very meaningful manner. And I appreciate it and look forward to working with you.

Let me ask you a question, and I'll show my ignorance here. Is Olof – is it Palme or Palm?

LINDE: Palme.

COHEN: Palme? All right, well, I better understand. The two times I've been to Sweden I've made journeys to his stone – to his resting place, and to where he was assassinated. It struck me in a major way. I guess it was in the – was it the late '80s? Was it, like, '87 when he was assassinated? And I was a state senator.

And I wrote a letter expressing my regret. And one of my colleagues in the state senate in Tennessee was not a fan of his because he was, quote/unquote, "a socialist." But we got the letter off from the state of Tennessee. And the response from Sweden was prompt. And I've saved that letter. I consider it – because I was affected by Kennedy's assassination as a young man. And his assassination struck me the same way. A man of peace. A man who was loved by the Swedish people and just assassinated for no reason the streets, just walking.

So I've got a very strong fondness for Sweden. As a young man, my hero was Floyd Patterson. And Floyd Patterson had an unfortunate interaction with Ingemar Johansson's right hand. But he came back to defeat him twice. But I was a great rivalry. And he came to love Sweden. And that was his – one of his favorite countries. And the Swedes loved Floyd Patterson. So for those reasons, which are not maybe the most concrete or the best reasons, I've found an appreciation for Sweden.

And you encompass all of the best of Sweden. And you have a difficult job. You're right next to Russia. You're right in the midst of it. We're an ocean away. So Russian aggression is constant. So I appreciate your efforts. We have to continue to try to speak and strongly encourage the principles of the OSCE, even in places like Russia where they're not observed at all, and Belarus. Have you had any opportunity to have any interaction with anybody in Belarus or with Lukashenko?

LINDE: Yes. Thank you. And thank you for your kind words of Olof Palme. He was assassinated in '86. And since I was active in the youth organization at that time, I had a possibility to meet him. And he was an inspiration to us all. And he always said that his visit to United States when he was a young man was really very important for his political activities later in life.

On Belarus and meeting with Lukashenko, and also on Russia, let me first say I think it's perfectly possible to have a constructive dialogue also with Russia. We work, for example, in the Arctic Council, where there is no issues of military security or security policy. It's issues like climate change, people-to-people contacts, health issues, those issues. And here we – and we have really, really good cooperation in these issues among the eight Arctic Council countries, including United States. And I think it's important also to always believe it is possible to have dialogue and, at the same time, be firm on keeping the commitments and principles when it comes to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

I met Lukashenko in 2019 together with the Finnish foreign minister because, as you know, Belarus has always kept, you know, open for cooperation to – well, the west side, if you might say. (Laughs.) And have been going from one side to the other. And when there has been very difficult situations – for example, in the midst of 2000 there was a lot of sanctions against Belarus. And sanction – I don't see sanction as something that is a punishment, but something that would change the behavior of a state. And when there was sanctions in the mid of 2000, more than 200 people were on the sanction list. And then all the political prisoners – or nearly all – were released. And then it was possible to remove the sanctions.

But now after – and that's why also when I and the foreign minister of Finland visited Belarus in 2019, we also wanted to discuss with Lukashenko why it was important to follow the commitments of OSCE, why we should have more contacts. And as always, I met with civil society. That was my first visit to Minsk, in 2004. And I've been following Belarus for a long time and supporting civil society there.

But now, as I said, after the election that was a fake election in 2020, in August 2020, so many things has been changed for the worse. I mean, this terrible violence that was used against demonstrators, against people just going out in the street, the terrible number – pure number of getting people – of detainees. And then treatment with torture and other things – that's just so unacceptable. And that's why we have to react strongly on this, both within the OSCE and telling Belarus that you are not living up to your expectation. We use now the Moscow mechanism.

And also then in other organization, like the EU where we now are working on new sanctions – and I also have a special envoy, Ambassador Kent Hårstedt, who is contact with all relevant parties and the Belarusian opposition. I have personally met with more or less all the main leaders of the Belarusian opposition to discuss with them, is there a possibility to turn this back in the right – on the right track? We offered the OSCE go to offices and to facilitate a dialogue between the regime and the opposition. And opposition was open to this. The regime was not.

And so right now there is absolutely no possibility for this. But I still hope that there will be a possibility to turn this terrible situation in Belarus to a more acceptable situation where the people can choose their own representative, and not a fake election, and where all political prisoners are released, and that it could be a country where opposition who has been forced in exile could return. Thank you.

COHEN: Thank you for your response. It's a – Elie Wiesel said that he looks around the world – he was a great leader in the word and America. And he looked around the world and he saw was awful conditions in Africa and in America and other places, he said, but despair can never be the answer. And in your situation, you have to remember despair can never be the answer. It's hard not to have despair when you look at Lukashenko, who knows power and will never want to give it up and will not give it up. But I think it's an awful situation. But we're fortunate to have you as our – as our leader in trying to continue in those efforts. Because that's an important front on the battle for human rights and electoral freedoms. So thank you.

CARDIN: I would just observe that Lukashenko is always unpredictable. And yes, there have been times when he's looked to the West rather than to Russia. But at this particular moment, in follow up to your previous question and answer, Russia's very much engaged right now to prevent Belarus from having the relationship that we would like to see in promoting any democratic values. So I think the challenges are going to be even more difficult because of Russia's engagement in this circumstance.

With that, let me turn it over to Representative Cleaver.

CLEAVER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Madam Chair, for being with us today.

You know, right in the shadows of the G-7, I am wondering what your read is, particularly in Eastern Europe, on the value of multilateralism. Is it something that is weakening? Is there an erosion of confidence in multilateralism, and whether these multilateral instincts are the thing of the future, as you've observed?

LINDE: Thank you very much for that important question. And first, let me say that I very strongly welcome United States back – (laughs) – to multilateralism, fully. It's a – I think that the challenges for the world are too big not to rely on multilateralism. There is no one power that could solve those challenges. And be it climate change, be it security issues, be it hybrid and cyber threats, we need to work in different multilateral organizations – and also for the wellbeing of our peoples. For example, I think it's much healthier to solve issues when it comes to trade without – within an organization like World Trade Organization or health, like the World Health Organization, than to just say these organizations are not working as we want so we pull out.

I think that's not the best way. I think the best way is to stay in and try to change, because there are, of course, a possibility for making those organization much better. And here was (a component to ?) the democratic backsliding. And what we can see is that the last years there has been a real democratic backsliding in many countries. And it's everything from not

only the election issues but also for getting people involved in democracy and to be able to make their voices heard on all levels – I mean, from local level up to the multilateral level.

And if you're interested in those issues, I'm very proud of the part that we have in Gothenburg, that's a Swedish town, it's called V-Dem, Variations of Democracy. And they have made so many interesting studies on democracy and so many facts on different parts that democracy now is backsliding. And if you don't have the fact, you cannot do anything about it. So I really like to go into their homepage and look at everything, because what we can see here also is many authoritarian leaders, they have understood that they need to have an election.

So they pull off an election. And then they think they're a democracy and that the ODIHR and the OSCE should clap their hands and say, hooray, you have an election, you're a democracy. And we need to challenge that and say: That's not enough. Just an election that doesn't have the possibility for opposition to campaign, for the people to get their voices heard, everything like that, that's not democracy. It's just fake election. And that's what happened in Belarus.

CLEAVER: Thank you very much. I apologize, one of my colleagues, Jared Huffman, has a podcast. I don't know what that really means. I mean, I guess he's a movie star or something. But I'm supposed to go in the next few minutes. So I apologize, but I'll go on with the movie star Jared Huffman. Thank you.

CARDIN: Thank you, Representative Cleaver.

We'll go now to Representative Moore.

MOORE: Well, thank you, Senator Cardin and Representative Wilson, all of my fellow members of the Helsinki Commission. Let me just say how delighted I am that the chairperson will be in Sweden. I started traveling with you, as you might recall, Senator Cardin, in 2006. And I immediately was charmed by the Swedes, who govern by a feminist perspective. And that matters, and it matters a lot in terms of how we're doing. I was so happy to read through the statement by our chairperson to see that she is doubling down on the Helsinki Accord and the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights.

And with those things said, I just wanted to ask Chairperson Linde about the OSCE and our positioning with regard to making sure that migrants – a problem that we have in all of the OSCE region, including the United States – to make sure that human rights are observed with handling migration. You know, I also want to note that human trafficking, sex trafficking, has – is a huge piece of migration. And the extent to which the OSCE and other participating states can make the appropriate interventions in that. And with that, I would yield for your response. And, you know – and, again, congratulations. I welcome you personally, Chairperson Linde, and Sweden. I think we're going to have great leadership at the top.

LIND: Well, thank you very much. And I guess all over the world we have seen now your Vice President Kamala Harris dealing with these difficult issues of migration. And my former Cabinet member, Ylva Johansson, she's responsible for migration in the European Union.

And these are global phenomenon – migration, forced displacement. And this also requires international cooperation because this is – this is an issue that we cannot, you know, solve by one state. So we need to address the challenges together.

As chair, I prioritize the important role of OSCE when it comes to supporting the participating state in implementing all the dimensions so that we can lead up to our responsibility. And here the autonomous institution, like the ODIHR, could play a role in assisting participating states in assessing, in formulating, in implementing immigration policies and legislations that are gender sensitive – that's important to me. We have a feminist foreign policy. But also protect the fundamental rights of the migrants, and to facilitate migrant integration into societies. But this is a real challenge. I mean, all our countries are struggling with this. There is no easy answer. Some think there are easy answers, and have, you know, easy solutions. But that's not how we're going to solve it.

When it comes to human trafficking, thank you for that question also, this is also concern for all participating states. It's both a human rights issue, but it's also a security threat. And for example, when I was visiting with Central Asian countries, they mentioned that they were so concerned about the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, and that that would lead to more migration into their countries, but also trafficking. Not the least, all the women that were now going to flee, and have started to flee, when the Taliban took over and are taking over more and more in Afghanistan. And women and girls are fleeing to the neighboring countries, like into Central Asia.

So this issue had also security perspective. And also, this question has, of course, a strong gender aspect. But also, we have already in January participated in the launch of the International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council. And then there is also, I would like to say – tell you this, very soon, 14th-16th of June, there is the 24th High Level Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons Conference. And the topic of this conference will focus on prevention and, in particular, on discouraging the demand that foster trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation but also forced labor. So this conference is organized by the OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator of Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings. It's the 14th to 16th of June that this is taking place.

I guess our time is up now. But thank you very much for your very interesting question. I'm sorry if I talked too much.

MOORE: No, thank you so much, Madam Chairperson. And I do want to say I agree with you on Crimea. I've been to Belarus before the intervention. And you could just feel, if we don't make these interventions now Belarus could go the same way as Crimea and remain that way.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your indulgence, and I yield back.

CARDIN: Madam Minister, you've been very generous with your time. Let me just compliment you on your statement about the importance of the human dimension. All three baskets of the OSCE are critically important, but you cannot have security or economic progress

unless you have good governance and respect for human rights and dignity of all people. And I appreciate your mentioning that. We've also seen as a result of attacks on the human dimension a decline of democracy, as Human (Rights) Watch has noted.

My point is that we have seen a dramatic increase in hate crimes in the OSCE region. And thank you for your work in regards to anti-Semitism and your announcements during this hearing. We will certainly be participating in all the efforts to deal with combatting anti-Semitism. We've seen a rise in hate, as I mentioned earlier, in regards to our Asian American community as a result of COVID-19. And we've had attacks against the Muslim community and the Jewish community as a result of what's happened in the Middle East. I anticipate in Vienna raising as an urgent agenda item the rise of hate in the OSCE region. We're not doing our normal Parliamentary Assembly considerations of resolutions, but to me this is an urgent issue that really needs to be addressed. And I appreciate your commitment in that regard.

The other area that President Biden has mentioned as a national security threat is the rise of corruption. Every country has problems of corruption, but when you – the government itself is embodied with a corrupt system it really does compromise all the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. So I think we need to put a focus on how we can work together to fight corruption. And I – as I said earlier, I anticipate legislation coming out of our Congress that will empower a stronger global commitment to understanding how we can deal with corruption.

We really do look forward to working with you. Please look at the Helsinki Commission as a resource that can help you with the goals that you have laid out. And we, again, thank you for your leadership, and we look forward to working with you during this challenging year.

LINDE: Thank you very much. And I hope you will get a good weekend.

CARDIN: (Laughs.) We hope so.

With that, the Helsinki Commission will stand adjourned. Thank you very much.

WILSON: Bye-bye. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 10:27 a.m., the hearing ended.]