



Helsinki to Helsinki: The Future of the OSCE

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Dr. Haltzel, Distinguished Panelists, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am grateful to the Embassy of Finland and the Johns Hopkins University SAIS Center for Transatlantic Relations for this opportunity to share my thoughts about the future of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. For more than three decades, the Helsinki process has been, and it remains today, a standard-setter in the field of human rights and democracy.

I am honored to take part in this symposium with legendary Ambassadors Markku Reimaa, Max Kampelman, Jim Goodby, and Jack Maresca, whose visionary leadership did so much to shape the OSCE and keep it true to its founding principles that link security *among* sovereign states to respect for human rights *within* them. I am delighted that Steve Minikes and our current OSCE Ambassador Julie Finley are here and look forward to their comments. I welcome also the presence of a number of OSCE Heads of Mission, with whom I have had the pleasure of working. Let me also acknowledge my colleagues from the European Bureau at the State Department, who do a wonderful job on all matters OSCE. I am also pleased to be on the panel this morning with my good friend Aleksandr Lukashевич from the Russian Embassy, and Paul Fritch and Ambassador Tazhiev, whom I saw 10 days ago in Astana.

As Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor – and as the State Department's representative on the U.S. Helsinki Commission – I am witness to the fact that other regional organizations around the world look to the OSCE as a model as they seek to strengthen their own capacities to promote respect for fundamental freedoms and democratic values. Prior to my current position, as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, and in other previous capacities inside and outside of government, my focus was what used to be the Soviet Union, and Central and Eastern Europe. So I appreciate the far-reaching contributions that OSCE has made to peaceful change in the region. OSCE helped to transform a continent divided by force into one united in peace and helped transform nations held captive under totalitarian tyranny into sovereign countries working to develop their own democracies. As Secretary Rice puts it: "The Helsinki process has not just borne witness to historic transformations, the Helsinki process has helped to bring those transformations about."

If OSCE is to meet the challenges of each new era, it must remain faithful to its comprehensive concept of security and core human and democratic values and keep focused on ways to put OSCE's guiding principles into practice. Otherwise, the OSCE will become a hollow organization. OSCE's value in the past – and to this day – makes it too important to let this happen.

As we look ahead to the Ministerial Meeting in December in Helsinki and further into the future, the United States remains ready to consider any ideas that enhance the OSCE's effectiveness and foster the implementation of OSCE commitments by the participating States. But we will oppose any effort that – either in its intent or its effect – would diminish OSCE's credibility, dilute the commitments of signatory states, divert OSCE's attention from tough Human Dimension issues or undermine OSCE's effectiveness on the ground. That includes OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, known as ODIHR. Any new procedures should not come at the expense of principle, and any institutional reforms should be geared to enhancing – rather than constraining – OSCE's ability to produce results on the ground.

Not surprisingly, it is from those participating States where fundamental freedoms are most challenged by government actions, and where democratic safeguards are the weakest, that we tend to hear the most criticism by state officials of the way the OSCE and its institutions and field missions conduct their work. It is precisely where the distance between commitment and conduct is greatest that the OSCE must continue to concentrate its efforts.

We applaud the Government of Finland for the outstanding way that it has carried out its responsibilities as OSCE Chair, and we look to the upcoming Chairs of the OSCE, Greece, Kazakhstan and Lithuania, to ensure that during their tenures the OSCE not only loses no ground, but rather enhances its capacity to tackle the most serious and difficult issues. Ten days ago, I accompanied Secretary Rice to Kazakhstan where she took the opportunity to review with President Nazarbayev the commitments Kazakhstan made at the Madrid Ministerial, both to the OSCE and with regard to implementing democratic reforms within Kazakhstan. We look to Kazakhstan – and are prepared to help Kazakhstan – to show leadership by example and, working closely with OSCE and civil society, make steady progress toward meeting all of its Madrid commitments, including the adoption of laws governing independent media and elections. We also look to Kazakhstan to ensure that any changes to the religion law meet OSCE commitments.

While the gains for human freedom and peace on the continent have been great from the vantage of more than 30 years' engagement in the Helsinki process, much remains to be done if Helsinki's great promise is to be fully realized in all 56 signatory states.

Regrettably, some OSCE states still regard expressions of concern about human rights in their countries as interference in their internal affairs, despite OSCE's comprehensive concept of security.

And today, almost 60 years since the adoption of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and more than 30 years since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, fundamental freedoms of thought, conscience, religion or belief, expression, peaceful assembly and association are under siege in a number of participating States. Authorities abuse their power and misuse the law to pressure NGOs, journalists and others in civil society, and members of the political opposition. So-called "extremism" laws, onerous registration and tax requirements and "defamation" laws constrain the legitimate, peaceful activities of human rights defenders, non-governmental organizations, religious groups and the independent media. Recent years also have witnessed threats or use of extra-legal means – including lethal violence – against members of the independent media in particular.

Due to the imposition of serious constraints on the exercise of fundamental freedoms, key elections in some participating States have fallen short – in a number of cases – egregiously short – of OSCE commitments. The United States rejects all efforts to undermine the effectiveness, objectivity and independence of OSCE election observation, and has welcomed OSCE ODIHR and Parliamentary Assembly observers to our own elections.

A time when human rights and democratic principles are under siege is no time to allow OSCE's principles, procedures, institutions and missions to be undercut.

Frozen conflicts in Moldova and the Caucasus have yet to be resolved through peaceful settlements. In this context, the United States reiterates the need, in keeping with the six-point ceasefire agreement, for European Union and OSCE monitors to be given unimpeded access to all of Georgia, especially the areas of conflict in and around the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, so that they can properly investigate all alleged violations of international law and abuses, and work to stop any that reportedly are ongoing – such as the destruction of ethnic Georgian communities and the forced displacement of ethnic Georgians. We also emphasize that the Russian Federation bears responsibility for protecting from harm those who have remained and for ensuring public order and the safety of the civilian population in areas under the control of its forces.

Even as we work to resolve longstanding conflicts, OSCE must also continue to work together to address the new transnational threat from terrorism.

There also is much we must do within OSCE to combat anti-Semitism and other forms of religious and ethnic discrimination, promote tolerance and put an end to trafficking in persons.

Let me offer the following in summation: The Helsinki Final Act did not legitimize an unacceptable status quo – though some insisted, and others feared, that it did. For more than 30 years, the Helsinki process has served as a source of inspiration and hope to men and women pressing for freedom and reform, and it must continue do so in the years ahead. As Secretary Rice has said: "Preserving the integrity of the Helsinki principles and ensuring that OSCE continues to be an agent of peaceful, democratic transformation should be paramount objectives."

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