

Statement of the Honorable Alcee L. Hastings
Hearing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
“The Future of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation”
July 23, 2009

Opening Testimony

It is my distinct honor to Chair this hearing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on “The Future of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation.” I welcome you all here today and the participation of my friend, Senator Benjamin Cardin who serves as Chairman of the Helsinki Commission and my fellow Commissioners.

As many of you know, for the past several years I have served as Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) Special Representative for Mediterranean Affairs and it is through this role that I have sought to enhance the long-standing relationship between the OSCE participating States and the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation that extends back to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, now the OSCE. The Final Act recognized this unique and important relationship in a specific section on “Questions relating to Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean.”

In the succeeding decades the OSCE Participating States and their Mediterranean Partners have worked to increase mutual confidence and develop economic and environmental cooperation in order to promote security and stability throughout Europe and the Mediterranean basin. It is through this unique forum that Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia continue develop their capacity for leadership in the region, all the while exchanging expertise with the OSCE participating States.

Near the end of 2008, I toured all of the Mediterranean Partner States, with the exception of Jordan which I have also visited on many other occasions. It was during discussions with my interlocutors that I proposed bringing them to Washington to have a candid discussion about participation mechanisms for their partnership with the OSCE and how these might be improved.

Over the past two days, my proposal last December became a reality. High-level delegations of parliamentarians and dignitaries from the OSCE Mediterranean Partners States of Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia gathered here in the Capitol Visitor Center for the Helsinki Commission “Seminar on OSCE Mediterranean Partner Engagement.” These delegations were joined by President of the OSCE PA João Soares of Portugal, President-Emeritus of the OSCE PA Göran Lennmarker of Sweden, Vice-President of the OSCE PA Jerry Grafstein of Canada, representatives of the Greek Chairmanship of the OSCE, representatives of the future Kazakh Chairmanship of the OSCE, and Ambassador Jonas Hafström on behalf of the Swedish Presidency of the European Union.

Sessions for this seminar included notable panelists, such as Paul Fritch of the OSCE Secretariat, Dalia Mogahed of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, Barry Pavel of the National Security Council, and Dr. Ian Lesser of the German Marshall Fund. Our discussions with these panelists centered on OSCE Mediterranean Partner participation mechanisms, security in the Mediterranean, youth empowerment, and challenges of the OSCE region, respectively.

These discussions yielded numerous recommendations, principle of which being how the Helsinki Process can be specifically optimized to negotiate the Arab-Israeli peace process and how to best utilize the OSCE Partnership Fund established by the 2007 OSCE Madrid Ministerial Council for tangible implementation of OSCE and OSCE PA agreements. These principle aims are vital to increased ownership of the OSCE Mediterranean dialogue by the partner States to sustain their engagement.

Other key points of discussion for these sessions included how to diversify the engagement of Mediterranean Partners in initiatives of the OSCE beyond politico-military priorities, harnessing the untapped potential of youth throughout the Mediterranean Partners, and the importance of increasing economic prosperity through trade in the region. The potential expansion of the Mediterranean Partners to include other States and territories in the region was discussed, those under consideration being Lebanon, Libya, Syria, and the Palestinian Authority.

The Helsinki Commission will soon publish a report on the proceedings of the seminar which I invite you all to review on our website in the near future.

Today we are joined by three distinguished witnesses who will help us synthesize the topics discussed throughout our seminar, as well as share their vision for the future and empowerment of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners. On our first panel we will be joined by Ambassador William Hudson, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. Ambassador Hudson has extensive experience in the region as a senior career Foreign Service officer and recently Ambassador of the United States to Tunisia. On our second panel we will be joined by Professor Sotiris Roussos of the University of Peloponnese in Corinth, Greece. Professor Roussos and I share a similar mandate in his role as Personal Representative to the Greek Chair-in-Office of the OSCE for Mediterranean Affairs. We will also be joined on our second panel by my good friend the Honorable João Soares, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and former mayor of Lisbon, the capital of Portugal.

I welcome our distinguished witnesses and look forward to their testimony.