

Hon. Ben Nighthorse Campbell

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Mr. Chairman, as President Bush has declared, "By promoting liberty abroad, we will build a safer world. By encouraging liberty at home, we will build a more hopeful America." For nearly three decades, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has provided a unique framework for advancing democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the expansive OSCE region. Today, comprising 55 countries, the OSCE has proven its ability to adapt to new challenges, even while remaining faithful to the core principles reflected in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris. As such, the OSCE is a vital tool for advancing U.S. interests in a region critical to our country.

The mission of the OSCE goes to the heart of the aims laid out in the National Security Strategy, although the organization is not mentioned by name. As the President stated in the introduction of that paper, "In the twenty-first century, only nations that share a commitment to protecting basic human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom will be able to unleash the potential of their people and assure their future prosperity."

Notwithstanding the obvious overlap between U.S. interests and the OSCE, the organization is underutilized by policymakers here in Washington. Operating on the basis of consensus, the OSCE has built up an extensive array of commitments ranging from the rights of individuals to profess and practice their faith to the conduct of democratic elections and the treatment of Roma. Recent events have underscored the fact that no country is beyond reproach when it comes to human rights and fundamental freedoms, none.

The OSCE provides a framework within which the United States can and should reinforce points of concern with other participating States. From addressing ongoing repression in Belarus and the critical elections this Fall in Ukraine to concerns over anti-Semitism and related violence throughout the OSCE region, the OSCE is doing important work that other organizations to which the U.S. belongs simply can't. Setting up a zero-sum dynamic between the OSCE and these other institutions makes that much sense, zero.

The comprehensive scope of the OSCE should make it a first thought not an afterthought for U.S. policymakers. Recent moves by Moscow, Minsk and several other capitals to emasculate the OSCE under the guise of so-called reforms, reveal the policymakers there at least recognize the success and potential of the organization. Protestations that the OSCE is somehow imbalanced -- paying too much attention to human rights -- should be seen as the diversionary tactics that they are. Such pronouncements are further undermined by the fact that some of the most significant advances of late in the OSCE have come in the security dimension, most notably areas such as promoting the use of biometric travel documents, stemming the proliferation of man portable air defense systems (MANPADS), more effective border management and security, and enhancing international container and cargo security.

Setting up a zero-sum dynamic between the security, economic and human dimensions of the OSCE makes that much sense, zero. A more reasoned approach would recognize that many of the challenges the participating States face today are indeed multidimensional in nature.

Efforts to build upon these initiatives in the security dimension should be encouraged. Similarly, creative thinking should also be employed to make better use of the economic dimension. I have repeatedly cited the nexus between international crime and terrorist financing as an area ripe for OSCE engagement, an excellent example of the kind of multidimensional challenges faced by participating States throughout the OSCE region. The Charter of Paris envisioned the possibility of convening meetings of ministers other than foreign ministers. The U.S. should propose that an OSCE ministerial be convened to address the links between terrorism and international crime.

The area of conflict prevention is another example where the OSCE can and should play an important role. In recent weeks disturbing developments in parts of the Republic of Georgia and the Transnistria region of Moldova have threatened to erupt into open conflict. Ironically, as Russian-backed separatists in these regions threaten the territorial integrity of those countries, the war in Chechnya enters its fifth year with death and destruction with the most egregious violations of international humanitarian law anywhere in the OSCE region. The OSCE has proven that it can play a useful role in such conflicts if there is political will to enlist its assistance. Nearly five years after the Istanbul OSCE summit, the Russian Federation has yet to fully implement the commitments it agreed to with respect to its forces in Georgia and Moldova.

Mr. Chairman, in the National Security Strategy President Bush acknowledged that "Our own history is a long struggle to live up to our ideals." Given my own background I can attest to the truth in that statement. This struggle is far from finished and if we are to lead in the promotion of liberty, we must be honest when we have fallen short. I am convinced that by so doing we will contribute to a stronger America at home and abroad.

Earlier this year America lost a true champion of liberty and freedom, President Ronald Reagan. President Reagan effectively used the framework of the OSCE to win the release of hundreds of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, facilitate the reunification of thousands of divided families, and overcome repression for millions.

Mr. Chairman, the utility of the OSCE as an instrument for change did not collapse under the rubble of the Berlin Wall, rather it has gained access to new avenues to advance democracy and human rights, enhance security, and secure a more prosperous future. As our nation faces new challenges, the task is to use the OSCE more effectively and creatively.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.