

Open Skies Treaty 20th Anniversary Remarks

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Ambassador Boros, Ambassador Gregory – thank you so much for the kind introduction and, of course, for your generosity in co-hosting this lovely reception in honor of the anniversary of the Open Skies Treaty's signature at the Helsinki Summit in 1992.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues, it is my distinct pleasure to join you here today in Vienna. I say distinct because the March 24th anniversary date also happens to be my birthday!

It was my privilege to chair the second Open Skies Review Conference in June of 2010, and I have been keenly following Treaty issues since then. As I said at the 2010 Conference, the United States remains firmly committed to the Open Skies Treaty, and I am pleased to inform you all that we have completed our internal policy review and have started the process for transition to digital electro-optical sensors on U.S. aircraft. We will keep you informed through the Working Group on Sensors as our plans progress.

As many of you know, I have been consulting on a range of conventional arms control issues here in Vienna, as well as in capitals. I look forward to continuing those discussions on finding solutions to preserve, to strengthen, and to modernize the conventional arms control regimes here in Europe, of which the Open Skies Treaty is one important pillar.

Strengthening and maintaining European security is a top priority for the United States and as Secretary Clinton reiterated in Munich a few weeks ago, we remain committed to working with our European counterparts to advance our mutual security. Arms control is a key part of that effort. The United States believes that robust multilateral conventional arms control arrangements contribute to a more stable and secure European continent.

We believe that the three pillars of European arms control have contributed enormously to the security of Europe since the early 1990s: The Open Skies Treaty of course, the subject of our celebration today; the Vienna Document; and the CFE Treaty. Each of these regimes is important and contributes to security and stability in a unique way. When implemented together, the result is greater confidence for all of Europe. It is important that we do everything we can to ensure full implementation of all three pillars of conventional arms control in Europe.

This Open Skies anniversary serves as an opportunity to reflect: to reflect on the Treaty's origins and on our accomplishments. Looking back, we can see that we would not be celebrating the success of the Open Skies Treaty today if it weren't for the original introduction of the proposal by President Eisenhower, 57 years ago at the Geneva Summit of 1955.

The Geneva Summit was itself a special occasion, one meant to reduce international tensions during the Cold War. In introducing the proposal, President Eisenhower made it clear that the primary objective would be to “relieve the world of the great fear of surprise and devastating attack.” Although the Open Skies idea was not accepted at the time, it did plant the seeds of openness and transparency that were later harvested by all of us.

President George H.W. Bush re-introduced the concept of Open Skies on May 12, 1989, in the waning days of the Cold War, just six months before the Berlin Wall came down. Just a few days earlier, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney encouraged him to expand the proposal from a bilateral approach to one that included the entire membership of the NATO alliance and the Warsaw Pact. It is therefore quite fitting that we have come together here today through the involvement of Hungary and Canada, partners who were instrumental in launching the Treaty.

As Ambassador Boros mentioned, the first test flight in January 1990 by Canada in Hungary turned out to play a critical role in the development of many of the Treaty procedures that are still in use today. I believe you can see a video clip of that first flight later.

During the Open Skies Conference the following month in Ottawa, former Secretary of State James Baker noted that the dramatic events of the preceding months had given Open Skies new importance as a stabilizing factor in East-West relations. He observed that openness and transparency in military matters offered “the most direct path to greater predictability and reduced risk of inadvertent war” and that Open Skies was “potentially the most ambitious measure to build confidence ever undertaken.”

While much has happened under the Treaty and much has been accomplished, its potential, in our view, has not yet been fully tapped. Extending the Open Skies concept to the OSCE partners is an idea to be explored. Parties need to upgrade to digital sensors as soon as possible, and application of the results should be used to address a wider range of transnational threats and verification challenges. This discussion is not limited to governmental officials, by the way. Just last week some of my colleagues – including Diana Marvin, who many of you know very well, I’m sorry she could not be here today; she is so deeply involved in implementation of the Treaty and such a resource for us in the United States as I know she is for all of you – she was last week at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University to study further verification opportunities under the Treaty. Indeed, you may have seen an op-ed published in the International Herald Tribune on Monday by former Secretary of State George Shultz and his colleagues, which describes the importance of Open Skies for our future work. And the op-ed was partially a product of the discussions at Hoover last week. So, great interest among the non-governmental community also on this important issue of where we go from here with Open Skies.

So what began as a bilateral proposal between the United States and the Soviet Union over half a century ago has since grown and expanded to 34 States Parties today. I think President Eisenhower would be gratified to know what the Treaty has contributed toward lasting peace and security here in Europe. I also think President Bush would be delighted to learn that

over 840 observation flights have taken place, including flights shared by Russia and NATO states – a concept that was certainly unimaginable back in 1955.

The biggest single challenge we face for the continued success of the Treaty is the future availability of resources. The Treaty will only be as good as the States Parties make it, so we urge all parties to redouble their efforts to modernize the Treaty to allow for the use of new technologies and ensure sufficient assets for future operations. Ongoing implementation of the Open Skies Treaty is essential to meet our shared objectives. We want to see the Treaty thrive into the future, and I invite you to join me in continuing to develop its impressive legacy.

After twenty years of negotiations and cooperation, together we have progressed from “peaceful co-existence” during the Cold War, to what I would now call an era of “peaceful partnership.” Let’s work together for the next twenty years of Open Skies partnership! To mark this partnership, the United States has prepared a special commemorative patch – you see it represented up here on the screen – and we have some here to pass out. Please see my colleague Jon Vernau to pick one up during the reception.

Thank you very much once again for inviting me to speak today; it’s been a huge honor as well as a pleasure.