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Congressman Lee M. Zeldin
First Congressional District of New York

STATEMENT OF

Representative Lee Zeldin

Helsinki Commission Hearing on

“Serbia’s Leadership of the OSCE”

February 25, 2015

Mr. ZELDIN: Chairman Smith, Ylli, Agron, and Mehmet Bytyqi were residents of Hampton Bays, New York and American citizens when they were executed and dumped into a mass grave in Serbia by Serbian Ministry of Interior officials at the end of Serbia's war with Kosovo in July 1999. The Bytyqi's had traveled to Kosovo to fight Slobodan Milosevic's slaughter of ethnic Albanians, a fight that was supported by the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). After the war, they had given up arms and were on a humanitarian mission to escort Roma neighbors to a safe zone when Serbian officials kidnapped and executed them. Their ultimate detentions and executions were made without due process of any kind.

We are grateful that Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic, Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic, President Tomislav Nikolic and their predecessors have pledged to investigate the Bytyqi deaths and bring justice for the surviving family. Despite these promises, I am concerned that there has been no discernible progress in the case. Equally concerning is the fact that Goran Radosavljevic, the commander of the facility where the Bytyqi's were murdered, remains a close advisor to the current government.

Today, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) faces enormous challenges. Human rights, democratic norms, and the rule of law are core to the OSCE mission. I am hopeful that under Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic's leadership, Serbia will guide the OSCE to new heights in these and other areas. Serbia has certainly shown tremendous progress and ability in reforming many of its own institutions. This bodes well for its leadership of the OSCE. However, I call upon the Serbian government to also aspire to new heights in its own processing of war crimes from the 1990's and to finally ensure justice in the Bytyqi case. Such efforts will lead to improved relations between Serbia and the United States, a goal that I fully support.