



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony : Mr. Boris Kodjoe

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Chairman Hasting, thank you very much for inviting me to participate in this very important and timely hearing. I am pleased that you are focusing on the experience of Afro-descendants in Europe, as this is a story that has received little attention and yet, is certainly a profound part of my own and the continents' history.

Growing up in a small town in Germany over thirty years ago, the situation was quite different than today. While my family and I may have been atypical for Germany at that time, we certainly did not feel unwanted. In this regard, my story may differ from others. There were no neo-Nazis parading through our town or far-right parties such as the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) brandishing anti-migrant posters or calling for persons who looked like me to be thrown out of the country. We were proud to be Black, German, and everything else that embodies being a Kodjoe. It was that foundation that was also critical to a small town boy becoming a world famous actor and owner of the global fashion company Ziami.

However, major events in world history such as September 11th have certainly in their wake also highlighted a more negative side to all of our societies. As a product of different cultures, and now the father of multi-cultural children – German and American, our emphasis must be on finding the similarities that unite, instead of divide us. This is the reason I have in the past been active in helping youth learn to embrace and benefit from cultural diversity and fight racism and ignorance. In this regard, I have also noted the efforts of the “Initiative Schwarze Deutsche” or the “Initiative of Black Germans.” Having lived in Europe, Canada, and the US, the countries of the OSCE region have much to learn from one another. I see this hearing as a major opportunity to solidify transatlantic linkages and look forward to continuing to work with the Helsinki Commission in this fight.

Chairman Hastings, it is my understanding that you are preparing legislation related to this issue. Please consider me an early supporter of these efforts.

On behalf of my family and myself, thank you.