



*American Jewish Committee  
A Century of Leadership*

**Hearing of the  
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe  
Taking Stock: Combating Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region**

**Testimony of**

**Rabbi Andrew Baker  
Director of International Jewish Affairs  
American Jewish Committee**

**February 7, 2008**

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I want to thank Congressman Alcee Hastings and Senator Ben Cardin for their leadership of the Helsinki Commission and for convening this hearing on combating anti-Semitism in the OSCE region. I am honored to be invited to testify this afternoon. I also want to salute the work and dedication of Congressman Chris Smith and others who serve on this Commission. It is an important message both to Americans and Europeans that there is broad, bipartisan support on these important matters.

*A Resurgence of Anti-Semitism in the Twenty-First Century*

When this decade opened few people anticipated that the problem of anti-Semitism in Europe would engage us with the intensity and concern that is now the case. No lesser figures that French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have in recent months spoken at some length about the current problems of anti-Semitism—a welcomed sign that it is receiving the attention it needs but also troubling that such attention is required in the first place.

In October 2000 European nations gathered at a preparatory meeting in Strasbourg to prepare for the UN Conference on Racism scheduled for the following year in Durban, South Africa. At that meeting no one had any inkling that the Durban Conference would become an infamous reference, a place where in the NGO forum and on the street Israel would be vilified and Jews physically threatened, a precedent for turning the unresolved Middle East conflict into both reason and excuse for attacks on Jewish targets and the demonization of the Jewish State.

At the time we were primarily concerned with the continued but low level presence of neo-Nazi and right wing groups throughout Europe. They were responsible for nearly all of the anti-Semitic incidents such as cemetery desecrations and synagogue daubings. Holocaust denial, even in the presence of living survivors, was another troubling fact. We urged vigilance and reminded people that these were still present-day problems. Yet at the same time we took comfort in the fact that the influence of these extremist forces was steadily waning and mainstream political leaders were vocal in their condemnation.

Yet we were caught off-guard.

In subsequent years we have witnessed a dramatic change for the worse—significant increases in anti-Semitic incidents, attacks on synagogues and Jewish schools and on individuals with most of them stemming from Arab and Muslim communities. Certainly

there was a connection to events in the Middle East, to the breakdown of the peace process and the advent of the second *Intifada*. European leaders were slow to recognize this and reluctant to call it anti-Semitism. In France especially political leaders contrived to hide the Jewish nature of the targets, suggesting that this was a wave of general vandalism carried out by restless and unemployed young men. And when it was no longer possible to ignore, the Middle East conflict and more particularly the Israeli treatment of Palestinians were offered by way of explanation, as though a school bus carrying Jewish children in a Paris suburb was an appropriate substitute for Israel.

### *Acknowledging the Problem*

Admittedly, Jews had come to feel secure in a unified Europe half a century after the end of the war. On a personal level they were accepted and successful members of their respective nations. Holocaust education and remembrance had become a formal element of many schools and governments. Attitude surveys reflected a steady decline in prejudice. European Jews felt less inhibited in giving public voice to their beliefs and feelings, which often included strong bonds to the State of Israel. But this proved illusory. Admittedly, the new wave of attacks on Jews came from a segment of society that was itself on the margins and viewed negatively by many in the general population. But the political elites did not rise to condemn the attacks, and many of them harbored their own anti-Israel attitudes, which also animated the attackers. That led many European Jews to question their place in society and some even to doubt for their future.

As European leaders were slow to recognize this new wave of anti-Semitism they were similarly unable to recognize or to consider credible the heightened concerns of European Jewry. It was therefore ironic but perhaps fortuitous that the message was essentially delivered via America, and more particularly via the U.S. Government and Members of Congress.

### *Positive Developments within the OSCE*

Once the problem itself was acknowledged—and that alone took months—it became possible to seek ways to combat it. In retrospect we can see that the OSCE has become an important venue, perhaps the most important venue, in which to address this problem. Significant credit must be paid to Ambassador Stephan Minikes whose stewardship of the U.S. Mission in Vienna during this critical period was key to these tangible achievements.

- In 2003 the first conference focused exclusively on the problem of anti-Semitism in Europe took place at the OSCE headquarters in Vienna. At that meeting the U.S. delegation spoke of the importance for governments to monitor and record anti-Semitic incidents and for police to learn how to recognize and deal with such hate crimes.
- In 2004 the German Government hosted a follow-up conference in Berlin, opened by the President and hosted by the Foreign Minister. At this meeting the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) was instructed to develop a

program to deal with the problem of anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance which led to the creation of a new department. Their activities would eventually include pressing governments on legislation and data collection, the development of pilot projects in the area of education, and an innovative program of police training.

- The Berlin Declaration adopted at that conference on behalf of the collective 55 member states of the OSCE while mandating the new ODIHR responsibilities went on to state that anti-Semitism had taken on new forms and expressions and declared that events in Israel and the Middle East can never justify anti-Semitism.
- In 2005 the OSCE agreed to the appointment of a special envoy—a personal representative of the Chair-in-Office with the exclusive mandate of combating anti-Semitism.
- Also in 2005 several of us worked closely with the European Union Monitoring Centre (now the European Fundamental Rights Agency) to develop a working definition of anti-Semitism. This definition, which was distributed by the EUMC to its monitors in the European Union and was also incorporated into various materials of ODIHR, provided a clear and comprehensive description, and it also described the special problem and offered examples of where anti-Israel animus becomes another form of anti-Semitism.
- Subsequent conferences in Cordoba (2005) and Bucharest (2007) continued to address the specific problems of anti-Semitism albeit in the context of a broader focus on intolerance and discrimination.
- Following their initial appointment, the Personal Representatives of the Chair-in-Office, including Professor Gert Weisskirchen responsible for combating anti-Semitism, were reappointed by successive OSCE Chairs, most recently last month by the Finnish Foreign Minister. Considering that some nations opposed on principle their separate and distinct mandates or saw them as a very temporary post, this was no simple accomplishment.

#### *Concerns about the OSCE's Future Commitments*

Despite these positive developments there are still doubts about the continued willingness and ability of the OSCE to address the ongoing problems related to anti-Semitism. There is the essential difficulty of maintaining the focus as time passes. Some countries believe that once you have spoken about a problem you should move on to another even if the problem itself remains unsolved. No doubt some imagined that a single conference on anti-Semitism in Vienna in 2003 would be the first and the last contribution the OSCE would make.

Additionally, throughout these past years a number of OSCE Member States frequently objected to any initiative which sought to distinguish the phenomenon of anti-Semitism

from other forms of intolerance. This was manifest in both petty (choosing the title of a high level conference) and substantive (reappointment of the Personal Representative) ways. Some OSCE Ambassadors in Vienna sought to subsume all initiatives under a single campaign against intolerance in general, euphemistically termed the “holistic approach.” They criticized what some called the “ghettoizing” of discriminations, perhaps not realizing how offensive the term itself was. In the end these objections were voiced but not imposed on the OSCE, whose consensus decision making process will always leave it vulnerable.

### *Understanding the Unique Dimensions of Anti-Semitism*

It may be necessary periodically to explain why anti-Semitism does not fit neatly as a subset of more general manifestations of intolerance and discrimination. Of course, anti-Semitism can refer to prejudice against Jews, but it is also revealed in conspiracy theories that blame Jews for political and economic ills throughout the world. Thus, it may take root in places where there are few or even no Jews present. Discrimination against most minorities is frequently gauged by the degree of acceptance in their respective societies. When barriers in housing, education and employment come down, it is a sign that discrimination is also declining. Although once common, Jews in Western Europe seldom confront such direct prejudices today. But a society that may harbor no strong negative feelings toward Jews as individuals can still hold intensely unpleasant views of the Jewish people as a group, or of Judaism or of the State of Israel.

### *Police Training—An OSCE Accomplishment in Danger of Failing*

Even if the phenomenon of anti-Semitism may be unique, the tools to combat it need not be. They can in fact benefit all minorities. Data collection and education for tolerance are two such areas of focus for ODIHR as is police training. At the initial urging of the American Government and more specifically Members of this Commission, ODIHR developed a program for training police to combat hate crimes that drew substantially on experience garnered in our own country. Spearheaded by a veteran police command officer from the United States and working with a team drawn from law enforcement professionals in Canada and the United Kingdom, the Law Enforcement Officers Programme (LEOP) brought the tools of community policing and hate crime investigation to a growing number of OSCE member states. These are essentially police training police, who explain the definition of hate crimes (including the working definition of anti-Semitism) and describe how to work cooperatively with ethnic and religious groups on the ground. In December the training team was invited to Moscow to present the program to Russian police officials, who are confronting a significant increase in violent crimes against Jews and other minorities. The government of Ukraine (where such problems have also grown) has proposed signing a memorandum of understanding with ODIHR to institutionalize the training of its police force. And most recently the governments of Romania and Bosnia have sought to bring the training to their countries.

This is a remarkable program not least for being an American “export” at a time when we are viewed skeptically throughout much of Europe. Therefore, one would think that the

program should be embraced and supported by the State Department and the U.S. Mission in Vienna. Tragically and inexplicably this is not the case. Even though this police training program is viewed by ODIHR as its premier program in the area of combating intolerance and even though other OSCE member states have provided extra budgetary contributions to support it, the U.S. has evidently abandoned it. The State Department has not seen fit to provide any special financial support, even to cover the costs of the American officer. The leaders of the program in fact believe there is a concerted effort to denigrate the program and intentionally undermine support for it. This is an explosive charge and the police commanders do not make it lightly or without cause. Sadly, it may be past the point of redeeming the project, despite the fact that there is nothing else like it operating today.

### *Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe*

Much of our attention has been drawn to Western Europe, where developments have been both distressing and surprising. Our concerns over increased anti-Semitic attacks originating in Arab and Muslim communities and the rhetorical excesses in vilifying the State of Israel are primarily problems to found, in the OSCE vernacular, “west of Vienna.” But we should not lose sight of the fact that there are serious problems “east of Vienna,” too. Many of these countries are new members of NATO and the European Union. Prior to World War II many had substantial Jewish communities, but their numbers were decimated by the Holocaust and further eroded by postwar emigration. The countries were annexed by the Soviet Union or held captive behind its Iron Curtain, and for decades there was no possibility for them to confront openly and objectively their Holocaust-era history. In 1991 things changed, but these countries and their citizens saw themselves first as victims of Communist oppression, and it was not easy to get them to look back to an earlier time in their history when many of their citizens were complicit in the crimes of the Nazis. Some of them, reaching back to an era in their pre-Communist history for patriotic heroes, even came to rehabilitate Fascist leaders and Nazi collaborators.

It is to the credit of the United States that support for NATO enlargement demanded a focus on values, which was often measured by a country’s willingness to come to terms with this chapter in their history. These new democracies also confronted the claims of Jewish communities and individual Jewish survivors for the return of their former properties. The lion’s share of property claims came from present-day citizens or émigrés, but these Jewish claims often generated an anti-Semitic backlash. This was not an easy process. Witness the difficulties in some Western European countries such as France, Austria and Switzerland, where only after decades were authorities able to acknowledge their true role and make amends. The nations of Eastern Europe were expected to do the same in a fraction of the time.

We now recognize that many of them have fallen short. Among the examples, Slovakia and Romania have right-wing, xenophobic parties inside or courted by ruling government coalitions. Hungary and Bulgaria have witnessed the rise of new extremist movements.

In Poland *Radio Maryja* spews forth an ultranationalist message to millions of listeners. In Latvia in the face of populist and anti-Semitic criticisms Members of Parliament backed away from a Holocaust restitution bill that had been negotiated with the Jewish community and supported by the Prime Minister. Antisemitism may not be first on the agenda in these places, but it is still not far from the top.

Lithuania, which is in line to assume the OSCE Chairmanship in two years, deserves special mention for failure on several fronts. Although facing international criticism and a pending Congressional Resolution, construction work continues on the site of the historic Jewish cemetery in Vilnius. Legislation to restitute former Jewish communal property—something that has already been addressed by all other new NATO member states—remains stalled as the Government gropes for new excuses to delay action. Last year the Government Prosecutor opened a “war-crimes” investigation into the activities of a single former partisan—a teenager during the war who went on to become a hero in Israel’s War of Independence, the founding director of Yad Vashem and an historian of international standing. In this case as with the cemetery construction, political leaders privately acknowledge that the measures being taken are improper but they are unwilling or unable to stop them, fearful of an anti-Semitic backlash in the population if they do.

There are opportunities within the OSCE to address these concerns and to remind these governments of the need to more. Romania has offered to host a regional meeting later this year that will focus on the problem of anti-Semitism in Southeastern Europe. The Personal Representative can also take up the issue in his own travels. Members of this Commission can raise theme directly with their counterparts at the meetings of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

### *In Conclusion*

We cannot expect the special focus on the problems of anti-Semitism which are now acknowledged by the OSCE and carried out by ODIHR to run on autopilot. During this year the specialist on anti-Semitism within ODIHR has already left for another job. The director of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Program may leave before the year is out. And ODIHR’s Director, Ambassador Christian Strohal, will depart in the next few months. When the OSCE mandated these programs we were skeptical about ODIHR’s willingness and resources to undertake them. Ambassador Strohal has developed a strong and dedicated staff and has demonstrated his own personal leadership. This will not be easy to fill and will require your and our continued attention.

The U.S. Government is cutting its budget. Nearly all State Department programs are under scrutiny and those of the OSCE are no exception. But I believe they are notably underappreciated by the current leadership. The OSCE does not fall neatly within the State Department structure, and divided responsibility coupled with rapid turnover leaves it ill-served with no strong inside advocates. Few people—with the notable exception of the Members of this Commission—know how difficult it was to achieve the necessary consensus within the OSCE to address the problem of anti-Semitism and establish the programs that are now in place. These gains can be easily lost due to negligence and

inattention. They are certainly threatened when the United States is unwilling or unable to match the contributions of other member states.

This Commission has already heard from Professor Gert Weisskirchen, the Personal Representative of the Chair-in-Office for combating anti-Semitism. All of us who know him recognize his dedication to this assignment and the genuine “added value” he brings to OSCE’s efforts. Only two weeks ago he organized a special meeting in the German Bundestag which opened with remarks by the Chancellor and the President of the Parliament. Nevertheless, there is a perennial battle within the OSCE over his reappointment and that of his two colleagues. We and you will likely need to defend their record yet again come the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting this fall.

Perhaps the most political difficulties have been associated with the recognition that anti-Israel invective can rise to the level of anti-Semitism when it serves to demonize the Jewish State or questions its legitimacy or paints it as a racist endeavor or demands of it what is demanded of no other democratic state: Hence the importance of the EUMC working definition of anti-Semitism, which describes this aspect and offers several examples. More could and should be done to share this definition and to encourage governments and other organizations to make use of it particularly in the face of targeted boycotts in the UK and elsewhere. It also has a special relevance as governments focus this year on plans for the UN Durban Review Conference. We all recall how the “Zionism is Racism” canard was revived at the original Durban conference, and we need to brace ourselves for a review conference that will be chaired by Libya and will most likely reflect the quite skewed perspective of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. In fact, the Canadian Government is so convinced that nothing good will come of it that it has already announced its intention to boycott the whole thing.

Fortunately the OSCE affords us the opportunity to deal seriously and soberly with the persistent problem of anti-Semitism in Europe. The presence of the United States around the table, the active participation of Commission Members in the Parliamentary Assembly, your continued diligence and attention to the work of ODIHR, and your willingness to shore up support when the attention of an exiting Administration may be waning are all necessary ingredients—perhaps more so today than ever before.