

Testimony to the Helsinki Commission
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At the outset, let me express my appreciation to this Helsinki Commission and to its Chairman, Representative Chris Smith, for the pioneering work you have done in identifying and addressing the problem of anti-Semitism in Europe. You have taken the lead in pressing the United States government and European States and in mobilizing the OSCE to confront this age-old scourge which has now presented itself in this century in yet new forms and manifestations.

Sadly, one of the problems we have faced and we continue to face is that governments are slow to recognize the very problem itself, let alone to marshal the necessary resolve and expertise to confront it.

Fifteen years ago at a meeting with American Jewish representatives in New York the French Foreign Minister argued strenuously that the vandalism and violent attacks on Jewish targets that were just then beginning to occur in France could not be considered anti-Semitic. They were, he said, merely the random misdeeds of unemployed and disaffected youth from the suburbs that paid no special attention to their frequent neighborhood targets. He then allowed that, perhaps they could be understood as reflecting the anger of the youthful perpetrators who were witnesses to the daily suffering of the Palestinians by their Israeli occupiers, as broadcast on French television. But in this case, he said, they should be considered political actions rather than anti-Semitic incidents.

But it eventually became clear that Jews were singled out for attack. And this anti-Semitism plain and simple could not be excused as some justifiable expression of anti-Israel views. Today no less a personage than the current Prime Minister of France says clearly and repeatedly that anti-Zionism and hatred of Israel are synonymous with anti-Semitism.

The comments of that French Foreign Minister were not an isolated example. Governments and even Jewish communities themselves in France and elsewhere were slow to recognize that early increase in anti-Semitic incidents. Most governments lacked the mechanisms to identify and record hate crimes, and fewer still to label those that were anti-Semitic in nature. Jewish organizations were only just beginning to develop their own tools to record incidents. And as we have come to learn, many of those incidents then and still now go unrecorded. So when the European foreign policy chief Javier Solana said to me in 2002, when we discussed the problem

of anti-Semitism, "I don't see it," he was correct. Most incidents were unreported, and most recorded incidents were not even identified as being anti-Semitic.

Although the problem of identifying the perpetrators of these anti-Semitic attacks may be less ignorance than political correctness, at the time it was often asserted that many of them had particularly strong feelings about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict precisely because they or their families came from the region. In doing so, they were not trying to identify and address the problem, but instead to explain and excuse it. After the breakdown of an active peace process and with the Second Intifada there was increasing animosity toward the State of Israel shared by a growing number of political leaders and the general public, and fueled by what many considered a distorted and biased media. Perhaps the targets such as synagogues and Jewish schools were not appropriate, but the anger toward Israel that drove these youthful attackers was somehow considered understandable. For some, merely identifying a political motivation somehow separated it from the "genuine" anti-Semitism that would be used to define attacks on the very same victims carried out by right-wing extremists.

Eventually, some balance was restored to this discussion. The very act of throwing a Molotov cocktail at a Jewish school bus defines it as anti-Semitism, regardless of the particular motives of the bomb thrower.

These early struggles on recognition and identification were reflected in the debates and deliberations of international organizations. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly took the lead, and it was followed by the OSCE itself and the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC).

In 2004, the EUMC conducted its own survey on anti-Semitism in the European Union. In interviews with Jewish leaders and representatives it found a high degree of anxiety and uncertainty. It also acknowledged the limited monitoring of anti-Semitic incidents and hate crimes more generally, and it revealed that most of the EUMC's own country-by-country monitors lacked even a working definition of anti-Semitism.

The Berlin Declaration adopted by the OSCE in April 2004 declared, "...unambiguously that international developments or political issues, including those in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify anti-Semitism." It also expressed the commitment of all the participating States to collect and maintain data on anti-Semitic hate crimes.

While many speakers in Berlin did not mince words, the official declaration could only hint at the problem, noting that anti-Semitism had, "assumed new forms and manifestations." Everyone was aware that the "new anti-Semitism" was a term used to describe the special animus being directed at Israel, whereby the Jewish State was demonized and its very legitimacy called into question.

Scholars and practitioners increasingly focused on this, arguing that any understanding of present-day anti-Semitism must take it into account. Only some months later, this was reflected in the Working Definition of anti-Semitism adopted by the EUMC and intended to fill the need made evident from its own first survey. The Working Definition was comprehensive, and it was especially notable for including a section describing how anti-Semitism manifests itself with regard to the state of Israel. This included calling Israel a racist endeavor, applying double standards, using classic anti-Semitic images to describe it, and equating its actions to those of the Nazis. It also cited an increasingly common phenomenon where Jewish communities themselves were held responsible for the actions of the Israeli state.

Since it was first issued in 2005, a growing number of governments, international organizations, and civil society groups have employed the Working Definition in their monitoring and education work, and others such as the Inter-Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism have called for its adoption. Unfortunately, these efforts were stalled a few years ago when the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the successor to the EUMC, removed the definition from its website.

At the same time, we can now cite the words of international leaders including Prime Minister Valls, President Obama, Prime Minister Cameron and Pope Francis that describe anti-Zionism as a form of anti-Semitism. The Swiss Foreign Minister, Didier Burkhalter, during his OSCE Chairmanship in 2014 called the Working Definition a useful document for governments and civil society in understanding this phenomenon, and the current German Chairmanship has voiced a commitment to press for the greater use of it.

Some people while acknowledging this new form of anti-Semitism might still question its impact, dismissing it as just a matter of words. But that would be a mistake. We have seen how those words have consequences, where anti-Israel demonstrations have turned anti-Semitic and then violent. They have had a corrosive effect on Jewish community security and have certainly caused many Jews to refrain from any public display of support for Israel or even their own Jewish identity.

Of course it is second nature for Jews to worry. But there has been a change, and more and more European Jews themselves wonder about their future in Europe. We know this not just anecdotally but empirically, as a result of FRA's comprehensive survey of Jewish experiences and perceptions in eight EU States carried out in 2012. Nearly half of those surveyed worry about being a victim of an anti-Semitic attack. Four in ten frequently or always avoid wearing anything in public that would identify them as being Jewish. And thirty percent have considered emigration because of the problem. We also learn from this survey that upwards of three-quarters of anti-Semitic incidents goes unreported.

Even as more governments undertake to record anti-Semitic hate crimes, very few of them seek to identify the perpetrators. Of those that do, they are usually defined in political

terms—namely, those ascribed to right-wing populists or left-wing extremists. But in the FRA survey those who witnessed or experienced anti-Semitism were offered a greater number of choices to identify the sources, and over fifty percent said they were people who hold, “Muslim extremist views.”

This reality—that many of the anti-Semitic incidents that Jews are experiencing today especially in Western and Northern Europe are coming from parts of the Arab and Muslim communities—still remains a very difficult thing for some governments to acknowledge. Some may fear that by doing so one is labeling an entire religious or ethnic group, although that must not be the case. There may be a concern that this will add to the prejudice and discrimination that many Muslims in Europe already experience and provide further ammunition to right-wing extremist parties. And in the case of France, home to the largest Jewish community in Europe, there are legal restrictions on even identifying people by religion or ethnicity.

But all of this leads to the same result. How can Jewish communities have faith that their governments will address a problem that cannot even be named?

And some attempts to speak about this while maintaining political correctness actually exacerbate the situation. It may be described as an issue for and between Jews and Muslims—“intercommunal tension” as one French Interior Ministry official termed it—as though this is somehow a problem for two minorities who bear equal blame. Some political leaders move immediately to the assumed prescriptions. We need to foster Jewish-Muslim dialogue, they say. There is no question that dialogue between Jews and Muslims (and between other religious and ethnic groups) is enormously valuable. But we should be clear. It was not the lack of dialogue that created the problem, and dialogue alone will certainly not solve it.

Although survey data is limited, we can see from what is available in some countries that European Muslims often have a higher level of anti-Jewish prejudice than the majority of the society. This should not come as a surprise. As German Chancellor Merkel pointed out earlier this year, they or their families come from countries where attitudes toward Jews are quite negative.

Acknowledging this is not to ascribe blame. It is the necessary first step to develop effective educational and public awareness programs to address the problem.

That FRA survey of 2012 already reflected a high degree of anxiety and uncertainty about day to day comfort and security, but government authorities were slow in recognizing it or responding to it. Meeting with Dutch officials in The Hague, I was told that increasing security in front of synagogues could not be done unless similar steps were taken for churches and mosques. In Brussels, Belgian officials conceded that the threat levels to Jewish communal buildings were quite high, but said they did not have the money to protect them. When the subject came up in Copenhagen, I was told by Danish officials that they rejected a request by the Jewish

community to position police in front of the synagogue and school because they had, as they put it, “a relaxed approach to security.” They were more concerned that the general public would feel uncomfortable if they saw armed guards in front of buildings.

Tragically, it took the terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in early 2015 to awaken authorities to the fact that Jews and Jewish institutions were among the first targets of radical Islamist extremists. Fortunately, most governments have stepped up their defense of Jewish institutions. Heavily armed police now patrol in front of synagogues and schools in Sweden and Denmark. In France and Belgium the military has been mobilized to guard these same buildings. In the Netherlands mobile police trailers have been erected in front of each synagogue and communal building, although (inexplicably) the police are only there to monitor and cannot leave the trailers. Jewish communities are grateful for these measures, which were long overdue. But now it is time to evaluate and compare them, to determine which are most effective and efficient. And what are the long term implications? Can this level of security be sustained indefinitely? What is the impact on Jewish children and their parents when the daily trip to school is a walk through military barricades?

The fear of radical Islamist extremists in Europe—and in America—has become palpable after the November attacks in Paris and last month’s bombings in Brussels. The task of identifying returning foreign fighters and those who are self-radicalized or inspired by ISIS has been an enormous challenge to intelligence and law enforcement agencies throughout the West. It is further complicated with the realization that among the hundreds of thousands of genuine refugees fleeing war-torn Iraq and Syria, there are likely additional terrorists and ISIS propagandists. And even for the vast majority who harbor no terrorist inclinations, there are obvious questions about how to address the deficit in values such as secularity, pluralism and gender equality that are an essential part of our Western societies. Surely then, it should be no surprise that the steady diet of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic propaganda which marked those Middle Eastern societies will not be easily corrected. Overwhelmed as many countries are with the physical tasks of providing for them, will they have the necessary resources and skills to genuinely absorb and assimilate these immigrants as well? Previous experience with smaller numbers over many more years makes it hard to be optimistic, but what then is the alternative?

In the meantime, right-wing, populist movements are emboldened by the crisis. Long-standing parties such as the National Front in France and the Freedom Party in Austria see their numbers growing. New parties such as Alternative for Germany are filling the vacuum. Some of these extremist parties—notably Jobbik in Hungary and Golden Dawn in Greece—have made anti-Semitism a main feature of their ideology. But even those which primarily feed on anti-migrant and anti-Muslim prejudices are cause for alarm. Bigotry cannot be compartmentalized, and the supporters of these parties are rather generous with their hatreds.

That 2004 OSCE Berlin Declaration stated that anti-Semitism poses a threat to democracy, to the values of civilization and to security in the OSCE region and beyond. That was both a warning and a more expansive reason (if one was necessary) that Jew hatred is wrong and must be confronted. Today there is ample evidence that this is true and that all are linked together. Yes, the struggle to combat anti-Semitism is about ensuring that we have an environment that is safe and secure and nurturing of Jewish communal life and the lives of individual Jews. But it cannot be separated from—and in fact it is really the measure of—how successful we will be in preserving the democratic and pluralist values which all of us holds dear.