



## HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

# Testimony :: Hon. Christopher H. Smith

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Co-Chairman - Helsinki Commission

The recent increase of anti-Semitic violence in Europe is of great concern to Members of this Commission and many Members of the United States Congress. Over the past months, Europe has experienced a significant rise in vandalism against Jewish cemeteries, synagogues and cultural property, as well as mob assaults, fire bombings and gunfire. From the United Kingdom through much of Europe to Eurasia, anti-Semitic violence has emerged to challenge our deeply held values of equality and civil society, and this sharp escalation of brutality is particularly alarming in light of Europe's troubling past.

Unlike the prejudice against minority religious groups that is spreading through Europe, intolerance of Jews is based on more than religion. Anti-Semitism is not necessarily based on the hatred of the Judaic faith, but on Jewish people themselves. Consequently, the resurfacing of these xenophobic attitudes and acts of violence is something that cannot be ignored by our European friends or the United States.

The participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, including the United States, have enumerated a clear position on anti-Semitism, responding to the region's past history and future concerns. In fact, the 1990 Copenhagen Concluding Document was the first internationally-agreed condemnation of anti-Semitism. It declared that all participating OSCE States "unequivocally condemn" anti-Semitism and would take effective measures to protect individuals from anti-Semitic violence.

While inconceivable that any OSCE State would promote blatantly anti-Semitic policies, in response to the recent spate of violence, not all governments reacted with appropriate timeliness or clear condemnatory language. Unfortunately, when governments fail to respond quickly or adequately to attacks, or are silent in the face of violence, an implicit statement is made. The silence concerning anti-Semitic attacks was contrasted with the fierce condemnation by certain European governments against actions taken by Israel. This rhetoric, combined with ever-increasing violence and government inaction, justifiably left a sense of isolation reminiscent of an earlier age.

Today, most OSCE States have engaged the issue, taking appropriate steps to deter further violence, through public statements, prosecutions and police protection of Jewish property. Yet, taken as a whole, the atmosphere of tolerance in many European countries has been

damaged.

As a result, the change in atmospheric conditions further fed the latent monster of anti-Semitism. For example, in France and the Netherlands, politicians promoting aggressive nationalism have fared well in recent elections. Neo-Nazi “skin head” propaganda and violence in Russia and other former Soviet Republics have reached alarming levels. The rise of the “extreme-right” is a startling reminder that the sins of intolerance and xenophobia remain prevalent in some circles.

But, while anti-Semitism still lurks from Europe’s past, hostility towards Jews has also erupted from second generation Arabs in France, Belgium and Germany.

A case in point concerns two Jewish students from my home state of New Jersey. Upon leaving prayer at a Berlin synagogue, these two Orthodox Jews had the misfortune of walking into a protest against Israel and against US policy with respect to the Palestinians. When the two students were approached by several protesters and asked if they were Jews, they answered “yes.” They were assaulted in the street, in the heart of one of Berlin’s most fashionable districts. Thankfully their injuries were minor, but German authorities have been unable to apprehend their attackers.

Clearly, all OSCE participating States, including the US, must be pro-active and vigilant when combating anti-Semitic violence. No country can afford to allow anti-Semitic violence to sprout and grow. It is imperative that OSCE States act boldly to root out and confront this dangerous trend.

Because of the significance of this topic and the gravity of the situation, today’s hearing will be an important tool to raise congressional and public awareness of the issue. During this hearing I hope to learn more about the situation of Jews living in the OSCE region, as our panel of expert witnesses will provide insight into their current strife. Their policy recommendations will be of great interest, I am sure, to myself and other Members. I want to thank each person for making time to share their thoughts on this very important issue.