



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Christopher H. Smith

Chairman - Helsinki Commission

Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to welcome you to this U.S. Helsinki Commission hearing on “Government Actions to Combat Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region.” I am very pleased to have many distinguished panelists present today and look forward to their testimony.

As we all know, roughly two years ago, a wave of anti-Semitic violence swept through much of the OSCE region. Unparalleled since the dark days of the Second World War, Jewish communities throughout Europe and North America faced repeated attacks against Jewish cultural sites, cemeteries and individuals. In the eastern portions of the OSCE region, anti-Semitic acts occurred in places long devoid of Jewish life, as hate-filled individuals tried to extinguish the last whispers of history testifying to a once vibrant Jewish community. Despite sincere government efforts, sporadic incidents continue to arise throughout the region, both east and west.

This convulsion of violence has sent a clear message that our societies still suffer from the latent disease of anti-Semitism. We are gathered here today to see what we can do -- what actions we can take -- to ensure that incidents of anti-Semitism become a thing of the past.

This hearing comes on the heels of the April OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism. At the historic Berlin Conference, held in a city of unquestioned significance, 55 participating States gathered together in the fight against anti-Semitism. The U.S. delegation was ably led by Mayor Ed Koch, and we are sorry he was unable to join us for today’s hearing. I also want to publicly thank Secretary Powell for making his personal attendance at the conference a priority.

In short, the conference was a success. U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE, Stephan Minikes, and his staff worked tirelessly to bring our Berlin achievements to fruition. A welcomed surprise was the Spanish offer to host a follow up meeting on anti-Semitism next year in Cordoba. We certainly appreciate the offer and look forward to working with the Spanish.

Particularly significant was the Berlin Declaration given by the Bulgarian Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Solomon Passy. Despite serious objections from some European countries and Mediterranean Partner States, the Declaration stated “international developments or political issues, including those in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify anti-

Semitism.” The declaration also highlighted increased commitments by all participating States to monitor anti-Semitic crimes and hate crimes.

The historic Berlin meeting was a highlight to our ongoing efforts to fight anti-Semitism, but it must not be our high-water mark.

Governmental and elected leaders must continue to speak out publicly when instances of anti-Semitism arise. Law enforcement officials must vigorously investigate and prosecute acts of anti-Semitic hate whenever and wherever they occur. Lastly, if we are to protect our children from the seductive evil of anti-Semitism, we must inoculate future generations from all its mutations and insidious forms through education systems that teach tolerance.

Since May 2002, I and other Members of Congress have spoken out repeatedly and forcefully, and last month Ben Cardin and I introduced a resolution furthering the successes of the Berlin Conference. One important element of H.Con.Res 425 is our call for the “Bulgarian Chairman-in-Office, in consultation with the incoming Slovenian Chairman-in-Office, to consider appointing a high level ‘personal envoy’ to ensure sustained attention with respect to fulfilling OSCE commitments on reporting of anti-Semitic crimes.” We do not want to create a new, permanent bureaucracy, but rather have the CiO designate an individual of high political standing to work with OSCE States on fulfilling their commitments.

Having a personal envoy of the CiO is the best way to complement ODIHR’s objective in moving countries to respond and bolster the fight against anti-Semitism.

In closing, many said segregation in the United States would never end. Many laughed at the notion that the Soviet Union would simply crumble and vanish. Many similarly scoff at the idea that anti-Semitism will ever be eradicated. In fact, two years ago when we first raised concerns about anti-Semitic violence, no one would have believed the Berlin Conference would ever happen.

We must be resolute. If we are not working to erase anti-Semitism completely, what are we working for? No amount of anti-Semitism can be tolerated -- not now, not ever.