



# HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

**Testimony :: Sen. Ben Cardin**

**Chairman - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

In 2002, the continuing phenomenon of anti-Semitism – indeed, its intensification – prompted me to work with other members of the Helsinki Commission and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to push for the OSCE to treat anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish violence as specific region-wide phenomena, particularly in light of the Holocaust. As a result of these efforts, in 2004 the OSCE convened a conference on anti-Semitism in Berlin. That meeting was a pivotal event in the effort to combat acts of extremism.

Most importantly, it produced a declaration that condemned acts motivated by anti-Semitism and other bias-motivated hate crimes, led to an OSCE commitment to monitor and collect hate crimes data, and paved the way for the appointment of three Personal Representatives appointed annually by the OSCE Chair-in-Office to focus on combating anti-Semitism, discrimination against Muslims, racism, xenophobia and other forms of religious intolerance, especially when that intolerance manifests itself in acts of violence.

Unfortunately, the challenges before us have not abated in the past decade. I am most profoundly alarmed by the increased instances of violence targeting people who are Jewish, who are believed by their attackers to be Jewish, synagogues, or other Jewish community buildings. On Passover eve in April, three people were murdered in Kansas outside of Jewish community centers. Three more people were murdered at the end of May at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. These attacks come when the pain and terror from the 2012 murder of four adults and three children at a Jewish school in Toulouse is still so profoundly felt. Last week, two synagogues in Paris were attacked. These horrible incidents illustrate that the physical protection of Jewish communities and their institutions is critical and more must be done to prevent such atrocities.

I am also alarmed by the electoral successes of extremist parties in a number of European countries – not only in the most recent European Union Parliament elections, but in national and local elections as well. Two countries in Europe, Hungary and Greece, have extremist parties associated with street militia. All of Greece's Golden Dawn MPs are now facing a variety of criminal charges, from attacks on immigrants to one case of alleged murder. The racist remarks of a Polish MEP in the European Parliament last week illustrate continuing prejudice towards people of African descent in the region. Most dangerously, extremism has also bled into the "mainstream." Years of anti-Roma rhetoric crudely stereotyping Roma as criminals, sometimes voiced by officials at the highest levels of government, has fueled an

escalation of vigilante attacks and other repressive measures against Roma.

While acts of violence may be our greatest concern, they are not our only concern. We should pay particular attention to the patterns of intolerance that contribute to a climate in which violence may ultimately flourish. Measures to restrict the production of halal and kosher food, to ban male circumcision, to restrict religious head coverings or other symbols of faith or even architectural features such as minarets – are discriminatory. But more than that, I believe that the political discourse that has accompanied the debates over these measures has actually contributed to intolerance and bigotry.

Clearly, 10 years after the adoption of the 2004 Berlin Declaration and a decade into the OSCE's work on these specific issues, a great deal remains to be done. I hope the OSCE participating States meet this fall to review, re-examine, and re-commit to efforts to combat anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry. The escalation of violent acts clearly demonstrates that more concrete action is needed.

Finally, I want to thank the Swiss Chair-in-Office for supporting the work of the three Personal Representatives and committing early in this year to facilitating this hearing.