



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Joseph R. Pitts

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Commissioner - Helsinki Commission

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this very important hearing on Escalating Anti-Semitic Violence in Europe. Recent reports and news articles reveal a very disturbing trend in Europe of attacks against specific religious and ethnic groups. Shockingly, many attacks have centered upon Jewish communities in Europe. Authorities in Europe have responded strongly to the attacks through public condemnation and security measures. Unfortunately, the anti-Semitic attacks could signal an increase in future violations of religious freedom in Europe as a whole.

As documented in numerous reports over the years, attacks against one particular group of ethnic and religious minorities often signals an increase in religious freedom and other human rights violations by governments or communities. In the former Soviet Union, for example, attacks on Jehovah's Witnesses or Seventh Day Adventists often came at the beginning of a wider campaign to limit religious freedom of minority groups. Religious freedom violations, however, have not only happened in the former Soviet Union, but also have occurred in Eastern Europe, Central Europe and Western Europe including France, Germany, Belgium, and Austria. Anti-sect legislation often was imposed based on hear-say stories about various religious groups. In Belgium, officials promoting limits on religious freedom added Charismatic Catholics and Orthodox Jews to their "bad guy" lists on the basis of hearsay evidence. One secret report alleged that Orthodox Jews stapled their children's fingers together. Sadly, ridiculous charges like these have helped form the basis of some government policies. Unfortunately, ludicrous charges like these also reflect societal attitudes, as seen in attacks against evangelical Christians, Seventh Day Adventists, Scientologists, and others. The recent outbreak of anti-Semitism may have been building for some years.

Mr. Chairman, racist, prejudicial attitudes and criminal action resulting from societal attitudes must be strongly addressed, particularly in light of Europe's history. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses about effective methods of addressing and countering anti-Semitism.