

December 2, 2011

Mark B. Levin Written Testimony to the
U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Senator Cardin, and Members of the Commission. My name is Mark Levin. I am the Executive Director of *NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia*. Since 1971, we have represented nearly 50 national Jewish organizations, including the Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, Hadassah, and AIPAC, and hundreds of local Jewish community councils, committees, and Federations across the country, including a number partnering with the OSCE.

Mr. Chairman, I welcome today's hearing on combating anti-Semitism. NCSJ has worked closely on this important issue for 40 years with officials and organizations in the United States, Europe, and the former Soviet Union, including OSCE.

This is a good time to reflect on progress made on this issue. Seven years have passed since the Second OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism in Berlin condemned all acts motivated by anti-Semitism and required participating states to take specific and practical countermeasures. Since then, we have seen an uneven response in the area that we cover: the former Soviet Union.

I would like to give a brief overview of current anti-Semitism across the former Soviet states. Official, state-sponsored anti-Semitism is virtually non-existent, but popular anti-Semitism, both non-violent and violent, appears to be on the rise, and official response across the region has been inconsistent. Much has been done by national governments, but more work remains. My remarks will focus on Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, and the Baltic states, traditional centers of Jewish life in the former USSR.

I'll start with **Russia**, home to the world's fourth-largest Jewish community. Russians and Russian Jews share a long and complex history that includes both official and popular anti-Semitism. Since the last two mass emigrations in the 1970s and the 1990s, Jewish emigration from Russia has leveled off, and we have welcomed a renaissance of Jewish communities across Russia. The Russian Jewish community's relationship with the current Russian government under both Putin and Medvedev has been generally good and often better than the historical norm. However, we remain concerned both by the rise of popular anti-Semitism in Russia and by the inconsistent official response to this movement.

Anti-Semitism in Russia today is most often political and street-level, and increasingly features a rising number of attacks by young skinheads and nationalists. Incidents most often involve vandalism against and firebomb attacks on synagogues, cemeteries, and Jewish community centers, but have also included outright physical assaults on Jews and attempted bombings of Jewish buildings.

More alarming is the fact that Russian human rights monitoring groups have reported a steady rise over the last ten years in the number of overall attacks by skinheads and extremists on minorities, migrant workers, and foreigners across Russia. Leading Russian human rights groups estimate that Russian far-right extremists now number in the tens of thousands, and warn that nationalist movements are gaining strength across Russia. A Russian nationalist riot took place in central Moscow next to the Kremlin itself just one year ago, on December 11, 2010, and massive and widespread Russian nationalist rallies on Hitler's birthday on April 20th have become annual events.

We are concerned by the strong potential for violence, including anti-Semitic violence, inherent in this movement, and urge the Russian government to strengthen its enforcement of

existing commitments, including to the OSCE Charter, and to take stronger legal action against incitement of racial hatred and overt calls for violence.

The Russian government has publicly denounced nationalist ideology and expressed support for legal action against anti-Semitic acts, but follow-through has been uneven. Some anti-Semitic attacks in recent years have in fact been successfully prosecuted as hate crimes, but many others continue to be dismissed as mere “hooliganism” or random violence. NCSJ will continue to engage the Russian government on this issue, and will continue to press for expanded prosecution of hate crimes against Jews and other targeted minorities in Russia, for enactment of more effective hate crime and hate speech legislation by Russian authorities, and for expansion of training programs to give Russian law enforcement the know-how to confront violent extremists.

I next turn to **Ukraine**, home to another vibrant Jewish community, the second largest in the former Soviet Union. Although popular anti-Semitism has persisted in recent years, the Ukrainian government has demonstrated a strong commitment to combating this trend, and has in fact achieved some successes.

Anti-Semitic vandalism and other incidents occur regularly, and have included physical assaults on Ukrainian Jews and visiting Israelis with at least two known fatalities, as well as firebomb attacks on and vandalism of synagogues and monuments, cemetery desecrations, and publication and distribution of anti-Semitic literature and leaflets. Inconsistent official response to many of these attacks showcases the reluctance of some local officials to prosecute racist and anti-Semitic crimes in Ukraine. Several prominent public figures, including Ukrainian parliamentarians and independent candidates for President, have also voiced anti-Semitic views in public venues in recent years.

A positive step in Ukraine’s fight against anti-Semitism has been the marginalization of the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management, better known by its Ukrainian acronym, MAUP.

This is Ukraine's largest private university, with over 50,000 students and many campuses. Until recently, it was also one of the leading purveyors of anti-Semitic and xenophobic material in Ukraine, publishing a large volume of virulent anti-Semitic publications, and inviting white supremacist and former KKK leader David Duke to lecture at the university. Starting in 2006/2007, the Ukrainian government began to take concerted action against MAUP, in part due to the rising concern shown by the international community, including by NCSJ. I am happy to report that both MAUP's influence and anti-Semitic output seem to have been halted in recent years, a clear victory for the Ukrainian government and for international human rights organizations.

Similarly, the Ukrainian government in 2011 has moved to toughen punishments for anti-Semitic acts, and has stepped up security for the annual pilgrimage by thousands of Hassidic Jews to Jewish sites for the High Holidays. Earlier, during President Yushchenko's administration, Ukraine's Security Service created a Special Operative Unit on Fighting Xenophobia, and the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry created the office of Special Ambassador on Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination. Likewise, deputies in the Ukrainian parliament introduced bills designed to punish hate crimes and displays of racial and religious intolerance, although actual implementation of this legislation has been slow. We welcome these efforts by Ukrainian authorities to recognize and confront the problems of extremism and anti-Semitism, and continue to work with the current government to build on this foundation and make progress on these issues.

I next turn to **Moldova**, home to an estimated 30,000 Jews, but once hosting a much larger community that has been significantly reduced by the Holocaust and, more recently, by high rates of emigration. As in Russia and Ukraine, Moldova's Jewish community has been reborn in the last twenty years, with synagogues, schools, and community centers opening across the country.

However, popular anti-Semitism continues there today, despite the government's condemnation of racial and religious intolerance.

Jewish cemeteries and buildings have been vandalized, and Moldovan and Romanian nationalists regularly make anti-Semitic statements. Two years ago, in December 2009, a radical Orthodox priest led his congregants to tear down a menorah on public display in the capital city of Chisinau during Hanukkah, in a particularly egregious example of intolerance. He was later charged with a misdemeanor and was fined a small amount.

The Moldovan government officially condemns anti-Semitism and has taken steps to combat it, including supporting Holocaust education in local schools and partnering with Jewish groups from Moldova and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. NCSJ will continue working with the Moldovan government to craft a more systematic approach to combating anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism is an especially complex issue in **Belarus**. Once at the center of Eastern European Jewry, the Belarusian Jewish community today numbers no more than 70,000. As in neighboring Ukraine and Russia, Belarusian Jews today have access to a wide range of religious, educational, and community resources and organizations. Belarus is also home to the only official Soviet-era Holocaust memorial in the former USSR, dedicated in 1946.

Incidents of popular anti-Semitism, such as vandalism of synagogues and community buildings and cemetery and monument desecrations, have occurred. Openly anti-Semitic publications have also appeared in recent years, in local newspapers and in books published by local publishing houses affiliated with the Minsk Orthodox Diocese.

Belarusian authorities have often shown themselves unresponsive to official complaints against anti-Semitic hate literature, and have inconsistently investigated or prosecuted perpetrators of anti-Semitic actions.

President Lukashenko himself has made on the record anti-Semitic comments in the recent past, and members of his administration have published openly anti-Semitic books and articles. However, relations between the Belarus Jewish community and the Belarusian government are generally stable despite evidence of periodic official involvement in popular anti-Semitism and official support for policies insensitive toward Jews and other minorities. Since Belarus is a signatory to OSCE commitments, NCSJ will continue to engage the government in an attempt to promote a more positive official attitude towards religious and ethnic tolerance in that country. I note that instances of productive cooperation with local officials have been possible on the ground in Belarus in recent years, and we hope to build on these successes.

Finally, I would like to address the situation with regard to anti-Semitism in the **Baltic states**. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are the most Westernized of the former Soviet states, and are to date the only post-Soviet countries accepted into NATO and the European Union. Despite this impressive achievement and despite the small size of their native Jewish communities – approximately 20,000 members in all three states – we have seen anti-Semitic episodes there as well. Especially in Latvia and Estonia, local nationalists and veterans of World War II-era Nazi-sponsored auxiliary units continue to generate anti-Semitic hate speech and stage annual marches with anti-Semitic and Nazi displays. The Prime Minister of Latvia stated last month that any member of his government attending these annual marches of Waffen SS veterans would be fired, which, while commendable, also highlights the persistence of these difficult World War II-era divisions in Baltic society.

Perhaps most disturbing has been the shameful prosecution in recent years by Lithuanian authorities of several aged Jewish Holocaust survivors for their wartime anti-Nazi resistance activities as somehow anti-Lithuanian. Although it appears that prosecutors are no longer actively

pursuing a case against these individuals, the instigation of their prosecution certainly sent a troubling signal.

NCSJ and other leading Jewish organizations have maintained a steady, productive dialogue with Baltic officials on these issues of concern. We will continue to press for their resolution, and for the governments to address issues such as community restitution and Holocaust education.

Mr. Chairman, the fight against anti-Semitism in the former Soviet Union today presents a complex picture, with both bright and dark spots, and requires a careful and calibrated approach. Unfortunately, anti-Semitic incidents continue across the region, and official response to these hate crimes is too often inconsistent. At the same time, all governments in the region officially oppose anti-Semitism, and local Jewish communities are in general far better organized, resourced, and internationally connected than at any time in the recent past.

I would like to offer the following recommendations to all the governments in the former Soviet Union, in the spirit of the 2004 OSCE Berlin Declaration. All countries must:

1) Strongly condemn hate: Incidents of anti-Semitism, political and religious leaders that polarize society, and media outlets which propagate intolerance, must be strongly condemned to send a clear message that incitement to and acts of ethnic, religious, and racial hatred will not be tolerated;

2) Enact adequate hate crimes legislation: To create an environment in which Jews and other minorities can live without fear, the successor states must enact hate crime and hate speech legislation and enforce existing laws for all citizens, including elected officials;

3) Train local law enforcement: To properly combat anti-Semitism and extremism, government must empower local police forces. Police must be able to delineate between ordinary hooliganism and a crime motivated by bias or hate. A well-trained police force will better follow

through on hate crime enforcement and investigations, leading to an increase in prosecutions, data collections, and dealing more sensitively with victims;

4) Monitor and catalogue incidents: Cataloguing and reporting anti-Semitic, xenophobic and bias-motivated activities enables prompt condemnation of such acts, increasing the chances that perpetrators will be apprehended swiftly.

5) Implement region-wide programs on interethnic understanding and Holocaust education: This is the most effective way to combat the roots of popular or “street” anti-Semitism. Teaching children the values of tolerance and basic human rights from a very young age begins to stop the perpetuation of ignorance and negative stereotypes of Jews and other minorities.

6) Reform the message of religious and media outlets throughout the region: Beyond the classroom and the government, the two other major sources of information in the FSU are the media and places of worship. Governments and non-governmental organizations need to work with leaders of these religious institutions and the editors of media outlets to ensure that they will spread a message of tolerance.

NCSJ will keep engaging governments throughout this region strongly and persistently on these and other problematic areas in the human rights field. We will continue to make our position known in the United States, in the former Soviet Union, and in international fora.

NCSJ and our member organizations are working hard to support the ongoing revival of former Soviet Jewish communities, and we look forward to continuing to work with Congress and the OSCE on these vital issues.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity and for the good work of this organization.