

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank you for the privilege of addressing this inter-parliamentary forum on behalf of the American Jewish Committee and its more than 125,000 members and supporters.

As a Past President of the American Jewish Committee and current Chairman of its Geneva-based UN Watch institute, and as an American with a record of four decades of service to my country and to the causes it champions around the world, I have viewed the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe the past two years with alarm.

Prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, I visited Europe regularly to assist in the flight of Jews and Christians from Communist oppression, particularly in Romania, where I later served as U.S. Ambassador.

While anti-Jewish sentiment was still apparent after World War II, it was visibly and encouragingly in decline in the ensuing decades, only to reemerge in the last few years in forms not previously seen. We are witnessing a reemergence of anti-Semitism that has left many European Jews feeling more vulnerable and, as a consequence, disillusioned and even more frightened than at any time since the Holocaust.

Mr. Chairman, the past two years have seen hundreds of aggressive, often violent, acts targeting Jewish individuals and institutions in the OSCE region.

Just last Wednesday night, 300 skinheads interrupted a Chanukah candle-lighting ceremony in downtown Budapest for over an hour with shouts of “Hungary is for Hungarians, and its better that those who are not Hungarians leave.”

In Ukraine earlier this year, 50 youths marched two miles to attack a synagogue in Kiev, where they beat the Lubavitch principal of a yeshiva.

In France, the problem has been particularly acute. Scores of synagogues and Jewish day schools have been firebombed and desecrated. In the month of April 2002 alone, the French Jewish community reported 119 anti-Semitic acts and 448 anti-Semitic threats – while the Government was dismissing these outrages as simple acts of vandalism.

In Belgium, where politically motivated legal proceedings (now dismissed) have been brought against Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the Chief Rabbi and a friend were assaulted and spit upon by a gang as they left a restaurant.

In Denmark, the widely circulated newspaper, Jutland Posten, ran a radical Islamic group's offer of a \$35,000 reward for the murder of a prominent Danish Jew.

In Germany, morbid reminders of the Holocaust have appeared in the form of slogans like "Six million is not enough," which was scrawled on the walls of synagogues in Berlin and elsewhere. Jewish memorials have been defaced with swastikas; Jews have been attacked in the streets – leading some German municipal officials to warn Jews not to wear identifiable Jewish symbols.

In Greece, newspapers have bombarded readers with anti-Semitic editorials and cartoons comparing the Israeli military operation in Jenin – where false cries of "massacre" have since been disproven – to the Holocaust and likening Prime Minister Sharon to Adolph Hitler. Such polemics reached a fevered pitch of hysteria and anti-Semitism in Greece.

These manifestations of Jew-hatred are rooted in a tradition of anti-Semitism that has plagued Europe for centuries. The historic, theologically based Judeophobia gave way to an ethno-centric nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in which Jews were viewed as an alien presence in the states of Europe, leading to suspicion, vilification, exclusion, expulsion and, ultimately, for two-thirds of the Jews of Europe, extermination.

The historical anti-Semitism of Europe has been given new life by voices on both the political right and the left. There are a number of factors at work here:

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and its distorted image in much of the popular media in Europe, has provided a pretext for anti-Semitic characterizations of Israel and its leaders and attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions.

Israel, closely identified with the United States, has become a surrogate target for anti-American and anti-globalization protests – making Jew-bashing an all-too-common mode of attack. Holocaust restitution issues have opened much that was long dormant – both bank accounts and anti-Semitic feelings.

Those right-wing parties that have always been anti-Semitic at their roots have gained new vigor in Europe by playing on anti-immigrant and anti-foreigner sentiments, which easily spill over into anti-Semitism. Jean-Marie Le Pen and Joerg Haider may be the best-known proponents of these views – but lesser-known and just as dangerous political personalities are on the rise in other Western European states.

These factors have provided traditional anti-Semites with new intellectual cover to rationalize their anti-Semitism – and swell the ranks of the new forces of hate.

Comments such as the reference by the French ambassador to Britain, who described Israel with a well-reported epithet not to be repeated here, or the criticism by a Swiss politician of “international Judaism” in the wake of the Swiss bank negotiations, are but examples, as are the words of a Liberal member of Britain’s House of Lords: “Well, the Jews have been asking for it and now, thank God, we can say what we think at last.”

I know from my personal experience that anti-Semitism is never far below the surface in Central and Eastern Europe. Openly anti-Semitic political figures – among them Vadim Tudor of Romania, Vladimir Zhirinovsky of Russia, and Istfan Czurka of Hungary – are among the names most familiar to this Commission, but they are not alone.

Against this backdrop, the pronounced growth of Europe’s Arab and Muslim population presents another factor. The Muslim community in Europe today may number close to 20 million. In France alone, some six million inhabitants with roots in the Maghreb region of North Africa are not integrated into French society nor held to the same standards when it comes to acts of violence. It is generally understood that most of the recent attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions in France have been carried out by members of this community.

Arabic-language cable TV networks such as Al Jazeera, print publications, and Internet sites, which offer predictably one-sided, inflammatory coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are also spreading virulent anti-Semitism. The Arabic media is awash in a “tidal wave of anti-Semitism,” according to Professor Robert Wistrich in an American Jewish Committee report, *Muslim Anti-Semitism: A Clear and Present Danger*. These outlets employ primitive Jewish stereotypes in service of their anti-Zionist message, often borrowing symbols and motifs from Nazi propaganda. Thus, one sees images of Jews as ghoulish, even satanic, caricatures with misshapen noses, and of Israelis bearing swastikas or drinking the blood of children. During the Ramadan that just ended, Arabic communities were treated to satellite broadcasts from Cairo and throughout the Middle East of a televised version of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Today, Arabic editions of *Mein Kampf* sell briskly in London and other European capitals.

Sadly, many officials in the OSCE region persist in viewing anti-Semitism as a purely political phenomenon related to the Middle East conflict; once the Middle East conflict subsides, violence against Jews, they claim, will also diminish. They have refused to recognize the severity of the problem as a longstanding issue of hate, racism, discrimination and, ultimately, human rights. Too often, they have failed to speak out against anti-Semitism with a pragmatism, intensity and a conviction that the current situation demands. They have also ignored the way in which the “new anti-Semitism” uses criticism of Israel and Israeli practices as a justification for acts of violence against Jews. As I stated at the outset, the problem of anti-Semitism today is more acute than it has been in decades.

There are exceptions to the prevailing lack of official will and vision in confronting anti-Semitism – few, unfortunately, as inspiring as that offered by German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer. But since many leaders in the OSCE region still cannot accept the gravity of present circumstances, they need to hear often and emphatically from U.S. officials, in the Administration and in the Congress, that anti-Semitism is again a serious problem in Europe, one that they must address. The United States has a great deal of positive influence at its disposal, and should use it.

The most recent round of NATO enlargement, announced at the Prague Summit last month, provided an example of the constructive role that the U.S. can play in this arena. Thanks to America's determined insistence over the past decade, governments in Central and Eastern Europe understand that they must address problems related to their Holocaust-era past before they can finally join NATO. The actions these countries have taken in this regard are directly connected to the NATO aspirations of their governments. For example, Romania – one of the seven republics formally invited to NATO accession talks last month, and a country I know well – has officially rejected the rehabilitation of its fascist war-time dictator, Marshal Antonescu, while the government has instituted a Holocaust studies program at its military academy in Bucharest and a course on tolerance at the University of Cluj, long a hotbed of Romanian-Hungarian tension – and even violence.

As Romania and the other six countries slated for NATO accession in 2004 undergo further review in the lead-up to ratification, the United States must remain vigilant lest these governments backslide on these issues. The Prague Summit is not the end; the Administration and the Congress must continue to hold these countries accountable in combating anti-Semitism and should encourage their ongoing efforts at Holocaust education and commemoration.

At the same time, the European Union should be encouraged to hold EU-aspirant countries to the same standard as that structure enlarges. Germany, as the country with the greatest awareness of the Holocaust and of the dangers of anti-Semitism, has a special responsibility in this regard.

Through its membership in OSCE – its “seat at the table” of a multilateral organization centered in Europe – the United States should work with EU member-states to make the problem of anti-Semitism a top priority.

Inter-governmental mechanisms such as the Council of Europe's European Commission on Racism and Intolerance and the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia have not effectively addressed the scourge of anti-Semitic acts. The United States and Germany have already shown leadership to overcome this failure.

The resolution adopted at the Parliamentary Assembly in Berlin was the key step initiated by you, Congressman Smith, together with German Parliamentarian Gert Weisskirchen, to mobilize participating states. Later, U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE Stephan Minikes led the way in Warsaw and beyond to garner support for the first-ever separate OSCE meeting on anti-Semitism, which we expect to take place in 2003. By focusing on the issue through an international forum, national experts and policy-makers will be able to create a system to assess and analyze the origins of anti-Semitism in order to build the legal and educational standards to eradicate the scourge.

Mr. Chairman, only last week Jews around the world marked the holiday of Chanukah, a festival that celebrates the triumph of freedom over tyranny – in which leadership made the critical difference. In our lifetimes, we have seen freedom's hard-won victory over oppression across Europe – vanquishing Nazism and throwing off the yoke of Communism. And we have seen the unique, irreplaceable role of political leadership in these struggles.

I recall, twenty years ago, celebrating Chanukah with my then-young daughters in a small Romanian village deep in the Carpathian Mountains. As we marked the Festival of Lights with our Romanian brethren, a menacing group marched on the synagogue in darkness. Suddenly, a Romanian police force appeared, turned back the mob – and saved this small remnant of Romanian Jewry that had gathered to light the lights of Chanukah. Violence was averted by official action, and the Chanukah celebration continued on.

Mr. Chairman, the history that befell European Jewry in my lifetime is a tragic one. With anti-Semitism now at its greatest peak since the most tragic of all human episodes, the Holocaust, let us be mindful of this history. Let us speak out; let us use our influence; let us remember the price of inaction or denial; and let us act now.

Thank you.