



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Steny H. Hoyer

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Commissioner - Helsinki Commission

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this timely and important hearing.

More than a decade ago, thanks to the outstanding leadership of my good friend, Ambassador Max Kampelman, and the contribution of Public Members like Judge Thomas Buergenthal, the OSCE participating States adopted the first international agreement to condemn anti-Semitism. That agreement, the 1990 Copenhagen Document, may be more relevant today than at any time since its adoption.

Like many others, I have been shocked and outraged by the tide of anti-Semitic violence which has swept over Europe in the past several weeks. According to press accounts, there have been more than 300 incidents of attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions in France since early April. In Belgium, there have been more than six attacks on the Jewish community, including the burning of a bookstore and a shooting at a synagogue, and similarly violent attacks against individuals and synagogues have occurred in Germany, Russia and Ukraine as well.

Mr. Chairman, in the face of such events, we cannot stand by in silence.

In countries experiencing such acts, national, local and community leaders must condemn anti-Semitism in the strongest terms and act swiftly to bring to justice those who would commit violent crimes – not excuse those activities as youthful excesses and hooliganism.

Such a response is to be expected from democratic governments and civilized society. Indeed, the OSCE participating States have pledged, in the Copenhagen Document, to do no less: All OSCE countries must take effective measures to protect individuals and their property from violence as a result of their racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious identity. The obligation to speak out against anti-Semitism – even when it does not rise to levels of violence – is one that must never be shirked. For to do so is to abdicate the most fundamental obligation of any government: the obligation to protect its citizens.

Mr. Chairman, there is much that I hope we will learn from our witnesses today. I hope our distinguished panel of witnesses will enlighten us regarding the parameters of the current threat to the Jewish community in the region; the connection, if any, of rising anti-Semitism to other worrisome developments, such as the rise of anti-immigrant political parties; and what

actions the governments of the OSCE participating States are taking to forcefully condemn and prosecute anti-Semitic violence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman