

Comments for CSCE Commission Hearing: The Rise of Hate Crimes in Europe

Thank you, Chairman Hastings. I am pleased that we could be joined today by these distinguished guests, to discuss an issue which is growing in importance for the United States and its European partners.

I am deeply concerned by the increase in discrimination and hate crimes in Europe. It seems to me that there are several factors at work, such as immigration pressures, political elitism, and current events in the Middle East. These pressures on European societies have contributed to a growing problem of ethnic and sectarian violence. Given the history of Europe, a particularly unwelcome but related phenomenon is the rebirth of virulent nationalism on the Continent.

For the past several years, I have watched with alarm as right-wing extremist parties have become more popular. These groups often espouse viciously anti-Semitic slogans, and appeal to a 19th century form of European ethnic identity. I had hoped that this identity had faded into the rubble of the last European war. But I may have been wrong.

In Hungary last month, 600 people publicly joined a right-wing paramilitary group in a mass ceremony. Members wear apparel reminiscent of Hungary's World War II fascist government, and support an ideology of xenophobia and bigotry. The ceremony was an unwelcome reminder of a bitter past, to which I cannot believe any European would willingly return.

The recent electoral victory in Switzerland of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) is also alarming. I do not believe the SVP is another version of those Hungarian extremists, but some of its tenets are eerily similar. For me, the SVP does not pass the respectability test, particularly when it is viewed in the broader spectrum of nationalist resurgence in Europe.

In places as diverse as the former East Germany and, incredibly, Israel, the presence of right-wing extremism and neo-Nazism has made the SVP's success more of a concern. I do not believe that all hate crimes perpetrated in Europe are attributable to these groups. However, they are at least part of the phenomenon of ethnic hatred which has plagued a glorious continent for too much of its history.

Thank you for participating in this hearing today. I look forward to your testimony and any light you can shed on this problem.