



HELSINKI COMMISSION BRIEFING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

[Print](#)

Testimony :: Dr. Kathrin Meyer

Advisor on Anti-Semitic Issues - OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions

and Human Rights

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about our activities in the field of Education on the Holocaust and on Anti-Semitism on behalf of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

It might not be clear on the first sight why the OSCE as the world's largest regional security organisation is involved in the field of Holocaust Remembrance and Education. Please allow me to give you a brief background to that question before I will present our activities regarding Holocaust Education.

The 55 participating States of the OSCE from Europe, Central Asia and North America reacted to the dramatic increase of racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic acts throughout the region with several high level conferences and Ministerial Decisions on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination since 2002.

In these Declarations the Participating states acknowledged the need for a specific approach to improve: data collection, legislation, training and education.

The ODIHR's mandate in the field of Holocaust Remembrance is based on the Declaration that came out of the Berlin conference on Anti-Semitism in 2004. At this conference the participating States recognized that Anti-Semitism has assumed new forms and expressions and that Anti-Semitism poses a threat to democracy, the values of civilization and to the overall security in the OSCE region and beyond. The same occurs to other forms of intolerance and discrimination, recognized in other OSCE declarations.

With the Berlin Declaration the OSCE participating States committed themselves (inter alia) to promote educational programs to combat Anti-Semitism, to promote the remembrance of and education on the Holocaust and to promote respect for all ethnic and religious groups. The ODIHR was tasked to disseminate best practices and to assist the States to implement these commitments.

Recognizing that Anti-Semitism poses a threat to the overall security in the region compels us to identify all different forms of this phenomenon. While the Holocaust was based on anti-Semitism, we can see today that Holocaust Denial or the diminishing of the Holocaust is one form of Anti-Semitism that occurs more and more often and is used as a justification for anti-Semitic acts, discrimination and hate crimes. That is why these two fields are strongly connected for us and that is why my office is involved in the field of Holocaust Education.

In order to fulfil our mandate the ODIHR started the work in this field with an evaluation. We developed the study: Education on the Holocaust and on Anti-Semitism in the OSCE region: An Overview and Analysis of Educational Approaches This study that is available online, gives a general analytical overview of ongoing activities in the OSCE region on Holocaust Education and provides a country by country overview. It also analyses the need for specific educational programmes to address contemporary Anti-Semitism. We are currently developing a similar evaluation for the general field of Tolerance education for the OSCE region.

With the study the ODIHR evaluated existing initiatives in the OSCE States, we identified those that could be developed

successfully elsewhere and identified good practices to support future efforts by OSCE states and civil society. But we also identified gaps and areas where teaching about Holocaust and anti-Semitism need to be strengthened.

The analysis showed that the Interest in the history of the Holocaust is growing in the region, that the Holocaust is a topic of history lessons but also in literature, languages, civic education, ethics and theology, as well as in extracurricular activities. So far 33 out of the 55 participating States commemorate Holocaust Memorial Days.

The following obstacles were identified:

- Lack of official directives specifically related to Holocaust education
- Lack of appropriate teaching material for Holocaust education but especially to address contemporary Anti-Semitism
- Lack of teacher trainings in many OSCE Countries

The study provides therefore comprehensive recommendations; let me highlight today just a few of them:

- Holocaust Education should be implemented in each participating State and needs to be strengthened in many

Contemporary anti-Semitism cannot be sufficiently addressed by Holocaust education, it should be acknowledged as an issue of itself.

- Teacher Trainings should be implemented in the OSCE States and supported by the governments

Sufficient teaching materials should be developed

There should be cooperation within the region between educators and an exchange of experience.

In order to follow our own recommendations we established close co-operation with key international organizations, such as the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF), Yad Vashem and the Anne Frank House Amsterdam. With those partners we developed joint assistance projects to support the implementation in participating States.

To follow our mandate to assist the implementation and to give very practical assistance to the States in the field of Holocaust Remembrance and combating Anti-Semitism but also in order to disseminate good practices, the ODIHR started to develop teaching tools on contemporary Anti-Semitism and on Holocaust Memorial days.

In cooperation with Anne Frank House Amsterdam and experts from seven countries (the Netherlands, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine and Germany, recently Denmark joined the project), teaching materials on anti-Semitism in seven special country adaptations have been developed, based on historical and social background of each country. The material has been translated and is recently being tested in schools. This material is a novelty, not only because of the international cooperation on it but also because there is almost no teaching material that deals with anti-Semitism and is not focused on the Holocaust.

The “ready to use” material that will give detailed information, graphics and assignments for the students will come in three parts for the students and a special teacher’s guide. Part 1 is on the history of Anti-Semitism, part 2 on contemporary forms of Anti-Semitism and part 3 puts Anti-Semitism into perspective with other forms of discrimination. The material in seven different languages and versions will be ready for the next school year as PDF documents on our website.

This exciting and important educational program has been supported so far only by very few States financially. And if we would get support in the future, we would be able to provide printed copies of that material to teachers and students in countries where access to the internet and proper printers is difficult for teachers that are willing to use the material.

Based on the commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and the experience that Holocaust denial becomes more and more common in some regions, we developed suggestions for educators on Holocaust memorial days in close cooperation between the ODIHR and Yad Vashem. Funded only by Germany so far the ODIHR brought together experts from 12 countries (Austria, Sweden, the Netherlands, Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, United Kingdom, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Germany and Israel) at Yad Vashem for an expert forum.

The document that came out of this cooperation has been circulated to you today for your information. These suggestions have been launched by the OSCE’s Chair in Office the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs during the celebration on January 27th in Brussels. The ODIHR provided an English and a Russian version.

The Belgian government developed French and Flemish translations and in Italy, Croatia and Hungary the Ministries of Education provided translations into their own languages and made the guidelines available on their websites. And just one week ago the Polish Government informed us that they are working on a translation that will be available on their website end of May.

Our suggestions for educators highlight really amazing initiatives of schools, educators and communities on Holocaust memorial days from 12 countries so far. They are being well received. On the ODIHR's and Yad Vashem's website there were 400-800 downloads of the document in each language each month.

If we will receive more funding for this project, we want this document eventually to be distributed in printed copies that come with a CD of good practices and also consist of a second part "Why and how to address contemporary Anti-Semitism", according to our understanding, that both fields are strongly connected. The CD with many more initiatives from more countries and regions as well as the second part on Anti-Semitism are under development right now.

This practical tool will help educators that have not have the opportunity to attend teacher trainings and have not been involved in Holocaust education to understand how many different activities could be undertaken by remembering those millions of men, women and children who perished during the Holocaust. I hope that these examples from our suggestions for educators will not only serve as an inspiration for activities on Holocaust memorial days, but also as an encouragement to start remembrance of the Holocaust where it is not commemorated so far. I am convinced that the remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust has an important influence on young people and what they learn from that experience will make a difference in today's world.

We hope that all our practical teaching tools will help to engage more governments to incorporate Holocaust Education and educational tools to address contemporary forms of Anti-Semitism as well as other forms of discrimination into their national curricula. We hope more governments will not only send us initiatives from their countries, but also translate ODIHR'S guidelines, make them accessible to educators in their countries and fund the ODIHR's educational program. This will allow us to continue our work and enable us to make the material that we developed so far available to educators all over the OSCE region.

My office is happy to cooperate with governments, and we are ready to give advice, share experience and assist in the implementation of Holocaust remembrance activities and teaching activities that aim to combat Anti-Semitism today.

Thank you very much for your attention!