

**Statement of the Honorable George V. Voinovich, United States Senator**

**Part II:  
“Taking Stock: Combating Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region”**

**February 7, 2008**

I want to thank Chairman Hastings and the Helsinki Commission for holding these important hearings on anti-Semitism. I also attended the hearing held on January 29th, and I felt that it was extremely important and very useful.

I would first like to extend a special expression of gratitude to my fellow commissioners Senator Cardin and Representative Chris Smith. Your leadership has been critical to the global efforts to combat anti-Semitism. I remember the many meetings of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the many resolutions that we worked together to pass. I am so grateful to partner with you on this work, and I want to thank you for inviting me to join your panel as an ex-Commissioner. You know this issue is very near and dear to my heart, and it means a lot to me that you are willing to welcome me back as an honorary participant.

I remember the moment that I committed myself to this issue. I was in Israel with my wife Janet, one of the many official visits that we have made to Israel together since my time as Mayor of Cleveland. The life of my daughter Molly, who was killed in a car accident in her youth, was honored by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) who dedicated a forest to her memory. It was during one of those early visits to Israel that we visited Yad Vashem. I was deeply struck and saddened by the horrible things that Christians had done to the Jewish people. I promised on that day that if anything like that ever happened again in my life-time, I would do everything possible to fight against it, and to emulate the actions of the righteous gentiles.

I recall working with the Chairman and Commissioners Cardin and Smith at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Berlin in 2002 to pass a resolution to combat anti-Semitism. Since that time, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has annually passed declarations addressing anti-Semitism and has agreed to concrete measures to implement their declarations.

In 2004, I worked with my admirable colleagues on the panel here to introduce and pass S.2292, the Global Anti-Semitism Review Act. That bill required the State Department to assess the rise of anti-Semitism and issue a report, which it did in 2005, detailing the disturbing trends. It also established the position of the Special Envoy to Combat Anti-Semitism. I was very glad to see that position filled, after a long period, and I am very happy to know that it is filled now, and that we have an individual working to address this issue on a full-time basis. Gregg Rickman, who is here to testify today, came to meet with me in my office on many occasions. I look forward to hearing what Gregg has been doing to combat a trend that continues to disturb us all.

We heard at the last hearing that despite our efforts in the United States and the commitment of the OSCE participating nations to the Berlin Declaration, anti-Semitism is not disappearing. It is alive and well. It is increasing in many places. It is continuing to result in horrible acts of violence and discrimination in Europe – a place that shares our values and seeks to uphold human rights and religious freedom. This is an issue that should concern all of us, and it should definitely concern the OSCE.

According to Tel Aviv University, 54% of all “major violent anti-Semitic incidents” and 43% of “major anti-Semitic attacks” recorded worldwide in 2006 occurred in Western Europe. The highest number of anti-Semitic incidents occurred in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

The EU’s Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) reports that in the last 5 years, anti-Semitic crime has increased by 62.4% in France, 15.5% in the U.K., and 1.7% in Germany.

Reports indicate that no country in Europe has been completely immune to anti-Semitic incidents. I want to site a few of the incidents to stress that no European country seems to be immune to the problem:

**BELARUS:** In late February 2007, neo-Nazi activists attacked Larissa Shukailo, and shouted "Get away to your Israel!" Shukailo filed a complaint with the authorities, but no suspects have been identified.

**BELGIUM:** On July 5, 2006, a North African man yelled anti-Semitic insults at two Jewish boys and returned later with friends to assault the Jewish boys. One boy was badly hurt and the other escaped. The perpetrators were not found.

**FRANCE:** On April 21, 2007, vandals damaged 180 graves, a quarter of which were Jewish, in the main Le Havre cemetery of Saint-Marie.

**THE NETHERLANDS:** In late October 2006, for example, 15 gravestones were vandalized in a Jewish cemetery in Beek.

**RUSSIA:** On May 5, 2007, an assailant threw a Molotov cocktail at a synagogue in Saratov. No suspects were apprehended.

**GERMANY:** March 8, 2007, 63 tombstones were destroyed at a Jewish cemetery in Diesbeck.

But I want to stress that there are many positive steps being taken by the OSCE states to document and reverse this trend.

In Germany, two men were arrested in connection with the cemetery desecrations that I just mentioned, and in 2006, German authorities reportedly conducted 257 investigations of these incidents and made 29 arrests.

This is just one example of some work to stop these trends, but I do think it is important to note the positive steps that nations are taking to fight back. We need to highlight them publicly and congratulate these nations for taking the problem seriously, reporting the crimes when they occur, and running the investigations that will lead to prosecutions. By citing and praising these steps through the OSCE forum, we provide an incentive for other nations to do more.

I want to note that I also received a letter from the Ukrainian Embassy this week that I would like to submit for the record. Ukraine has experienced some negative trends on anti-Semitism. Last year, I raised my concerns about this with the Ukrainian Ambassador and asked for an update. The Ambassador provided me with some information that I think is very encouraging. Ukraine's President Yushchenko has established a Special Operative Unit to Fight Xenophobia and the unit has arrested a suspect who circulated the notorious anti-Semitic brochures in Odessa on December 24, 2007. Ukraine's Parliament is taking many legislative steps to strengthen hate-crimes legislation. And many other steps are mentioned here that are encouraging signs.

I want to congratulate Ukraine for its work on this and thank the Ambassador for providing the information.

In conclusion, I am very eager to hear from our witnesses, and most importantly to hear their recommendations about how the OSCE and its members should proceed in the future. I would like to know how Congress can help. As you can see, we are very committed to this issue, and we look to you for your advice.

LETTER FOR THE RECORD

On Ukraine's record in the field of fighting anti-Semitism and xenophobia

February 5th 2008,  
Washington, D.C.

Dear colleagues:

Let us inform you that the Government of Ukraine conducts a full-fledged investigation into the January 24 attack against Dnipropetrovsk Rabbi Dov-Ber Beitman. Last week the leader of the Jewish community in Dnipropetrovsk Mr. Korol commended the law enforcement for the "serious efforts" exerted to bring those responsible to justice.

On this occasion let us also point out the steps made in Ukraine lately to make hate crimes prevention more effective. A major measure was taken in October

when on the order of President Yushchenko Ukrainian Security Service SBU created a Special Operative Unit on Fighting Xenophobia (SOUFX).

Within months this decision proved timely and effective. In particular, SBU has managed to promptly apprehend and arrest the suspect, who circulated the notorious anti-Semitic brochures in Odessa on December 24 2007.

In late January the SOUFX apprehended a Kyiv resident who was preparing to vandalize the Kyiv Podol Synagogue. The case has been expediently investigated and passed on to the Attorney General Office.

In addition to establishing SOUFX, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine decided to extend the Department of Crime Detection by adding a “Special Unit on crimes against citizens of other nations”. More steps are foreseen by the 2009 Program on Fighting Racism and Xenophobia introduced by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine.

The efforts of President Yushchenko and the Executive are backed by the newly elected Verhovna Rada (the Parliament) of Ukraine. A crucial milestone on this way might be reached with Verhovna Rada passing the new amendments clarifying the definition and toughening criminal liability on hate crimes. These pieces of legislation have been lately introduced by President Victor Yushchenko (Amendment # 1395) and Rada Members Olexander Feldman (Amendment # 1395-1) and Hennadiy Moskal (Amendment # 1325).

In August '07 the Ministry of Education and Sciences of Ukraine decided to introduce Tolerance Lessons in High and Middle schools throughout the country, which will be taught along with the Course on Holocaust History offered on a standard basis by some Middle Schools, High Schools and Universities in Ukraine.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been especially responsive and perceptible in fighting xenophobia in Ukraine. In September '07 it established the office of Special Envoy on fighting racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Ambassador Olexander Gorin who was appointed to this position has been one of the organizers of the Round Table “Ukrainian society and the memory of Holocaust: educational aspect” held by the Ministry’s Diplomatic Academy on January 28 2008.

Aside from this, let us remind you of UKRAINE’S POSITIVE RECORD in resolving the problem issues with the Jewish Ukrainian community.

- In October '07 President of Ukraine issued a decree obliging the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine to return the Torah scrolls, deposited in Ukraine's archives, to the Jewish community.

- In October '07 Ukraine's Chief Rabbi Moshe-Reuben Asman announced that around 50% of the Jewish communal property has been returned to the Jewish communities.
- In November '07 the Chernivtsi State Administration decided to return the building of the old Synagogue to the local Jewish community.
- In November '07 President Yushchenko visited Israel where he addressed the Knesset with a powerful statement on fighting anti-Semitism. He said, in particular: "We firmly and categorically reject all manifestations of anti-Semitism, xenophobia and intolerance to the human life. One has to fight these evils constantly and uncompromisingly, for they can poison the cleanest spring."
- While visiting Israel President Yushchenko agreed with President Olmert on establishing a Ukrainian-Israeli historian group to investigate contentious pages of the history of two nations. The first group of Yad Vashem experts promptly visited Kyiv in December and was received by President of Ukraine.
- Ukraine's record on exchange of Holocaust archive materials is pegged by the US National Memorial Holocaust Museum as "exemplary".
- On 11 December while (for the sixth year in a row) celebrating Hanukkah with the Jewish Community in Kyiv Synagogue President Yushchenko announced an "all-Ukrainian inventory" of the formerly religious property to be implemented in the first quarter of 2008. Upon the results of this inventory the property can be restituted if claimed by respective communities.
- Ukraine is the only Eastern European country that officially barred the notorious David Duke from entering its territory.
- All of the anti-Semitic attacks of 2007 and early 2008 are being vigorously investigated and many led to apprehension of suspects (the February '07 vandalism on the Odessa Jewish Cemetery, the April '07 vandalism on the Chernivtsi Jewish Cemetery, the September '07 assault on Jewish students in Sevastopol, the October '07 breaking and entering in the house of Uzhgorod Rabbi, the December '07 distribution of the anti-Semitic brochures in Odessa and many others).