

Testimony on
Anti-Semitism in Europe
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I would like to thank the Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to offer testimony today. This is not the first hearing this Subcommittee has held on the subject, nor my first occasion to sit before you. The ongoing interest and concern that is reflected in your actions are also a reflection of the seriousness of the problem. In my presentation, I shall focus primarily on the discernable trends in the manifestations of anti-Semitism today in Western Europe as well as on the responses of European leaders and institutions.

During these past several years we have observed an increase in anti-Semitism in Europe that is generated from three general sources.

Traditional Sources of Anti-Semitism

The first is drawn from the traditional elements on the right of the political spectrum. These include the activities of neo-Nazis and skinheads and other xenophobic and nationalist groups, which have been a persistent but limited danger to Jews and other minorities in Europe. Their activities range from shouting epithets at football games to the desecration of cemeteries and synagogues to physical attacks on persons. Governments are aware of them; political and social forces roundly condemn their activities; and police and law enforcement agencies have had experience in dealing with them. Many Western European countries, with legislation against racial and anti-Semitic incitement, have the tools to combat them or, at least, keep them in check. Jews are not alone in being targeted and are often not the primary focus of such groups, whose anger is generated by the pace of modernity in Europe, the growing number of immigrants and the diminution of nationalist identities within the European Union.

Of parallel concern is where these elements achieve a degree of political cohesion and manifest themselves in the electoral arena. Most notably we have witnessed the staying power of certain right wing parties, such as the National Front in France and the Freedom Party in Austria, whose racist and xenophobic appeals regularly flirt with anti-Semitism, as well. Their political obituaries that have been written over the years have been proven premature, but at the same

time their reach and influence seems to be limited. Mainstream political parties in Western Europe have either ostracized them or kept them at arm's length. The same cannot (yet) be said for Central and Eastern Europe.

Arab and Muslim Proponents of anti-Jewish Hostility

The second area of attention has been the violent anti-Semitic attacks that have originated primarily from the Arab and Muslim populations in certain European countries. Almost absent before September 2000, they have paralleled the breakdown of the peace process in the Middle East and the events of the second *Intifadah* in Israel and the Palestinian territories. In some countries—notably France, Belgium and the United Kingdom—Arab and Muslim youth have been identified as the major source of physical attacks against Jews and Jewish sites. Initially, governments were reluctant to acknowledge the specific, anti-Semitic nature of these events. The former Socialist government of France even maintained that synagogues and Jewish schools were not a special target of what was otherwise deemed youthful vandalism.

There were two reasons why a clear and candid recognition of the true nature of the problem was delayed. In the first instance, the European establishment viewed these incidents not as anti-Semitism, but as unfortunate outbursts of the Middle East conflict on European soil. In the past, European synagogues had been targets of Palestinian terrorists, and Jews had been the occasional victims of anti-Israel demonstrators. However, European leaders were late in recognizing that not only an anti-Israeli, but an anti-Semitic ideology has taken hold of a growing number of Arab and Muslim residents in Europe. There are not only graphic images of Israeli soldiers attacking Palestinians broadcast on satellite television from the Arab world. But there is also a steady flow of traditional anti-Semitic rhetoric and a recycling of Nazi-like propaganda available to Arab viewers in Europe. Neighborhood mosques and *madrassas* often feature sermons and lectures in which Jews, not Israelis, are painted as the enemy. The Middle East conflict may well have fueled the new outbreak of anti-Semitism, but it cannot not be blamed for it altogether.

Additionally, the Arab and Muslim attacks on Jewish targets revealed a much deeper problem that European leaders did not want to confront. In fact, they have posed a challenge to the basic assumptions of immigrant absorption and acculturation. In France this has meant a potential rupture in its strong secular tradition that eschews ethnic and religious separatism. In Great Britain it has brought into question the tradition of tolerance that has offered protection and security to minorities. In Germany, it has derailed efforts at immigration reform, a particular concern of the three million Turkish residents. To be sure, this would be a daunting challenge for the European Union, whose Arab and Muslim population now numbers between 15 and 20 million, even if it could ignore its anti-Semitic component.

A “New” Anti-Semitism

The third element that defines the problem of anti-Semitism in Europe today is certainly the one which European leaders have had the most difficulty acknowledging. It is a “new” anti-Semitism in which Jews and the State of Israel have become a special target of an untraditional array of groups, who seem themselves as “forces for good” battling globalization, racism, and American domination in the world today. The UN Conference in Durban, South Africa three years ago was perhaps the most notable example of how a gathering intended to fight racism could give rise to some of the worst anti-Semitic invective. Those expressions of hostility, in which Israel is labeled a “racist” state and Jews everywhere are held accountable for its “crimes,” have been regularly repeated on the European continent from mass demonstrations to parlor room gatherings. Well beyond the bounds of legitimate criticism, the Jewish State is vilified and demonized.

For those Europeans opposed to the American-led war in Iraq (and there are many), Israel and the “Jewish lobby” in Washington are sometimes painted as the sinister manipulators of U.S. policy. One Berlin newspaper, which published an article that focused primarily on the Jewish background of key figures such as Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz and Elliot Abrams, saw fit to illustrate it with a photo of President Bush meeting in the Oval Office with a group of bearded, black-robed Orthodox rabbis. In such fashion are anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism routinely linked. Because of the politically charged nature of the debate over the Iraq war and the Middle East conflict, and the distaste that many Europeans have for Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, it is often quite difficult to show that a line has been crossed and legitimate criticism—however sharp and vigorous—has become another manifestation of anti-Semitism.

Recognition of the Problem by European Leadership

It has not been an easy task to convince European leaders that they confront a serious problem of anti-Semitism, let alone to press them to take the necessary measures to combat it. But, there has been progress. The problem, at least to a limited degree, is now acknowledged, and governments are beginning to act.

In June of last year in Vienna the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) organized the first conference in its history devoted exclusively to the problem of anti-Semitism. Until that time the subject, if it was addressed at all, was usually subsumed under the more general category of “racism, xenophobia, intolerance, etc.” In fact, it was rarely mentioned, but left to be inferred from the catchall “et cetera” at the end. Had it not been for the U.S. Government (and, more particularly, for the pressure of Congress on an initially ambivalent Administration) that conference would have not have taken place. Many Europeans, although they were prepared to acknowledge that anti-Semitism was a problem in transatlantic relations, were still hesitant to admit that

it was a real problem in and of itself. The “success” of the Vienna conference was an agreement, requiring consensus of the 55 member nations of the OSCE, to hold a second, follow-up conference, which will take place at the end of this month in Berlin. In the intervening months, we have witnessed a growing recognition that the problem is real.

Much attention, for obvious reasons, has focused on France. It has the largest Jewish community in Europe (estimated at 600,000) and it has witnessed the greatest number of attacks on Jewish targets. Increased security and a “zero tolerance” policy espoused by a tough interior minister have dramatically reduced these numbers. Public expressions of solidarity with the Jewish community by the French President and other national leaders and the creation of a special commission on anti-Semitism have sought to quell the anxiety that many French Jews have experienced while also responding to critics from abroad.

In recent months several prominent EU leaders, including High Commissioner for Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana and Commission President Romano Prodi have spoken publicly in Brussels about the seriousness of the problem and seemed to have distanced themselves—at least in tone—from earlier pronouncements to the contrary.

European Union Monitoring Centre Reports

In 2002 the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) commissioned its first report on anti-Semitism, which was conducted by researchers at the Center for Research on Anti-Semitism in Berlin. The EUMC board, citing flaws in its “methodology,” decided not to release the study. Since the report identified both European media coverage of the Middle East conflict and Arab and Muslim community agitation as sources for the resurgence in anti-Semitic violence, it was widely presumed that political considerations were the real reason for its suppression. The EUMC Director used the occasion of the Vienna Conference last June to announce that the Centre would undertake a new, comprehensive survey of anti-Semitism in the EU, using its own resources and reporters.

That report (*Manifestations of Antisemitism in the EU 2002-2003*) was issued last week. It is thorough and detailed and, wherever available, draws on collected data for the years 2002 and 2003. In particular, it identifies an increase in the intensity of anti-Semitic incidents in five countries—Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK. In several other countries—Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal and Finland—it reports little evidence of any increase. However, the collection of reliable data is a serious problem in a majority of EU countries. Several have no provisions for the collection of any hate crime information in general, let alone singling out anti-Semitic incidents. In a number of cases, the EUMC has relied solely on asking Jewish community leaders for their recollections of past events.

The EUMC has also published a summary report (*Preceptions of Antisemitism in the European Union*) based on personal interviews with 35 Jewish leaders and observers in eight countries. These impressionistic and subjective views of the problem record what Jewish antennae pick up today—not only the empirical data of incidents, but also a sense of the public mood and political discourse—and are never far removed from the historical context of the Holocaust and postwar reconstruction. They describe a more troubling situation, where considerations of emigration and questions about the future of Jewish communal life are part of the daily conversation. Thus, in summation the report states:

Probably no other historical community of our continent has been subject to such a large scale of vexatious practices, symbolical aggressions and violent attacks, which affect the moral and physical integrity of its members, the normal exercise of their citizenship, the security of its community buildings and institutions, its image, its beliefs, its history and its solidarity structures as is the case for the Jews.

To its credit, the EUMC has not shied away from asserting that anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli expressions can also constitute a form of anti-Semitism. In particular, the report asserts that, when traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes are applied to the State of Israel, such is the case. Thus, depictions of Israel as a deceitful force, as a conveyor of international conspiracies, as acting for base or crooked motives, would by this description constitute manifestations of anti-Semitism. It may not be as complete a definition as some would wish, but it is an important step forward, particularly considering how many people wish to avoid the subject altogether.

In undertaking its study, the EUMC made use of its network of national focal points in each of the fifteen member countries. It is disconcerting to note that six of them do not even have an explicit definition of anti-Semitism; and of the nine which do, there is no single definition held in common.

Recommendations for American Action

In three weeks time the U.S. Government will have the opportunity to address European leaders directly at the OSCE Conference in Berlin. On that occasion it will be important to press for clear and tangible steps to combat anti-Semitism. These should include:

- Establishment of a comprehensive and ongoing process to monitor and collect data on anti-Semitic and other hate crimes
- Recognition that some of the most virulent expressions of anti-Semitism today emanate from the Arab world and their dissemination within Europe must be curtailed

- Acknowledgement that anti-Israeli expressions, including the demonization and vilification of the Jewish State, constitute a new form of anti-Semitism
- Development of an operative definition of anti-Semitism—in consultation with experts in Europe, the United States and Israel—that can be employed by governments and intergovernmental institutions such as the OSCE and the EU in the areas of monitoring, law enforcement and education

Facing Problems in Central and Eastern Europe

Most of the attention given to the subject of anti-Semitism in Europe today—and the main focus of this presentation—has been on developments in Western Europe. It is true that some of the most troubling manifestations have by and large not materialized in Central and Eastern Europe. But, it would be a mistake to conclude that anti-Semitism does not pose any problem for these countries. Jewish communities in this region are small in number. (There are more Jews today in metropolitan Washington than in the territory between Paris and Kiev.) They are still in the process of reestablishing themselves after the Holocaust and the fall of Communism, but it is not easy. Those experiences have made many Jews reluctant even today to admit their Jewish identity. Efforts to reclaim Jewish communal property that had been seized by the Nazis and nationalized by the Communists have met with limited success in most of these countries, but rarely without igniting the criticism of populist candidates, who see political gain through anti-Semitism.

There can be little doubt that the process of NATO enlargement and the close involvement of the United States with the evolution of the new member states provided a unique opportunity to press for concrete steps in the fight against anti-Semitism and the revival of Jewish communal life. By way of example, only within the last year we have witnessed the Government of Slovakia paying compensation for Jewish assets looted by the wartime Slovak state, the President of Romania establishing an international historical commission to examine the heretofore taboo subject of the Holocaust in that country, and the Prime Minister of Lithuania speaking out and his public prosecutor bringing charges against a newspaper publisher for printing anti-Semitic articles. Such developments are still not commonplace, but they are positive and important signals to small Jewish communities.

Closing Comments

In conclusion, we are witness to contradictory developments—some are deeply troubling, while others provide us with reasons to be hopeful. On a continent which witnessed the destruction of 2/3 of its Jewish population sixty years ago and which is today still home to tens of thousands of Holocaust survivors, any

resurgence of anti-Semitism is shocking. We had thought there was a permanent inoculation to this virus, but we were mistaken. A taboo has been lifted.

At the same time, European leaders, who have successfully reconciled their own national conflicts, realize that the current challenge is to battle the forces of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism that lie within their borders. The active involvement of the American Government is not only a means of prodding them into action—sometimes necessary but seldom appreciated—it is also the tangible expression of a shared commitment to common values and goals.

Thank you.