



**Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia,  
Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia**

**NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia**

**Before the**

**United States Senate**

**Committee on Foreign Relations**

**Subcommittee on European Affairs**

**April 8, 2004**

<http://ncsj.org>

<http://berlin2004.org>

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to testify on anti-Semitism in the former Soviet Union. I want to recognize your leadership and that of Senator Biden, as well as Senator Voinovich and your predecessor Senator Smith. This Subcommittee's role has been indispensable in our efforts to fight anti-Semitism and promote tolerance for many years. Your collective dedication to this cause has shaped the policy priorities of successive administrations and impacted on the lives of hundreds of thousands of Jews who – like so many other minorities – look to the United States as a bulwark and a beacon.

I also want to mention my colleagues from NCSJ, who are with me here today. Shai Franklin, NCSJ Director of Governmental Relations, has devoted much of the past few years to working with the United States Congress, the Executive Branch, our partner agencies and governments across Europe and the former Soviet Union, helping to conceive and establish an international mechanism that we were told could not and would not exist – the coordinated fight against anti-Semitism. Lesley Weiss, NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs, has built a cadre of young activists, student leaders and community representatives around the former Soviet Union, who are breaking new ground in relationships with other minority communities, law enforcement and local officials.

NCSJ is an umbrella of nearly 50 national organizations and over 300 local community federations and community councils across the United States. We coordinate and represent the organized American Jewish community on advocacy relating to the former Soviet Union, and our membership includes the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, United Jewish Communities, and many other well-known agencies devoted to promoting tolerance and combating prejudice and anti-Semitism around the world. I am pleased to be joining my colleagues from three of our partner agencies on this afternoon's panel.

Mr. Chairman, thanks to you and your predecessors, including Senator Biden, I have had the privilege to appear before this Subcommittee on several occasions, and to report on the nature and status of popular and political anti-Semitism in the successor states of the former Soviet Union. To briefly highlight several recent incidents since the first of the year, in March 2004 vandals threw rocks into windows at the kosher restaurant in St. Petersburg, Russia. Windows were shattered in a synagogue in Odessa, Ukraine. In Kharkiv, Ukraine, authorities announced the cancellation of a new gas station project, after the Jewish community objected to its erection adjacent to a Holocaust-era mass grave.

In February 2004, some 50 mostly Jewish gravestones were desecrated at a St. Petersburg cemetery, with some overturned and anti-Semitic graffiti on others. Molotov cocktails were thrown at a synagogue in Chelyabinsk, Russia. Regarding the ongoing stadium construction over a Jewish cemetery in Grodno, Belarus, we continue to work with the United States Government, Belarusian authorities and other interested parties toward a satisfactory resolution of this unhappy situation. In addition to his work on Grodno, U.S. Ambassador George Krol and his staff have devoted ongoing attention to the dissemination of anti-Semitic literature by the Orthodox Church in Belarus.

These incidents, while piling in comparison to some of the events in Western Europe, reflect a deep current running through post-Soviet society, and we are working with governmental and non-governmental partners on the ground. During the past two years, in no small part as the result of Senate and Congressional initiative, the United States Government and the collective European leadership have launched an effort to address and combat anti-Semitism on an unprecedented scale and level of coordination. Later this month, my colleagues and I, together with Senator Voinovich and a broad American delegation, will travel to Berlin for the action-oriented conference being sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and hosted by the German government. I should mention two new Web pages in addition to the official OSCE Web site: the NCSJ-sponsored [Berlin2004.org](http://Berlin2004.org), providing background, links and updates, and

the American Jewish Committee's [ngoforumberlin.org](http://ngoforumberlin.org) focusing on the series of non-governmental workshops on April 27.

Our goals for the Berlin conference are ambitious because the situation is critical. To be sure, anti-Semitism remains a significant, endemic problem throughout the successor states and across Europe. Much of the support for advancing this process has come from formerly communist nations, including successor states, who see fighting anti-Semitism as indispensable to their transition from the Soviet shadow. Building on last year's Vienna conference, the first-ever such international forum on anti-Semitism, Berlin must produce measurable commitments by the 55 OSCE member states and demonstrate actionable programs for governments to support and implement. In my testimony today, therefore, I want to focus on examples of the steps already being taken across the successor states to combat anti-Semitism and spur the development of more tolerant post-Soviet societies.

Some programs are significant because they directly respond to the plague of anti-Semitism, while others exemplify successful delivery systems for reaching law enforcement, educators, politicians, and religious or ethnic groups. The appeal of anti-Semitism should diminish with the rise of a healthy civil society, so ultimately the best guarantee is community of understanding across a broad spectrum of interests and issues.

Beyond the diplomatic level, the United States Government can have a significant impact by funding model programs and transmitting American lessons where useful. Particularly where local funding is unavailable, due to dire economic conditions, such U.S.-funded programs carry additional cache among local officials and the public. Even where such programs do not address anti-Semitism directly, they can generate new channels for outreach to law enforcement, local officials, ethnic minorities, media, educators, and society at large. Addressing anti-Semitism is much easier to achieve where relationships already exist among relevant interest groups, and as civil society sinks deeper and wider roots.

Even as the OSCE process continues to evolve and show results, other multilateral efforts are underway in the Europe/Eurasia region that merit mention. A series of two international conferences in Kazakhstan during the past year have attracted heads of state and other officials, and religious and ethnic leaders from across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East – prominent and credible representatives of Judaism and diverse streams of Christianity and Islam. With the involvement of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, these public events have generated publicity as well as joint declarations against terrorism and religious extremism, and in support of tolerance and inter-ethnic understanding and cooperation.

The First Interparliamentary Conference on Human Rights and Religious Freedom, organized in Brussels last September by the Institute on Religion and Public Policy, brought delegates from over two dozen countries, including Belarus, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. One session was titled “Anti-Semitism as a National and International Religious Freedom and Legislative Issue.” While anti-Semitism is not exclusively a religious freedom issue, the multiple manifestations of anti-Semitism can only be adequately addressed across a spectrum of disciplines and constituencies.

During the OSCE’s annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting last October in Warsaw, NCSJ organized a side event titled, “Post-Soviet States Respond to Anti-Semitism.” This roundtable discussion was attended by dozens of delegates and NGO representatives from Europe and the former Soviet Union, as well as the United States delegation and Members of Congress. Participants focused on the nature of anti-Semitism in their countries and opportunities for coordinating efforts through OSCE and other channels. I will be submitting a separate report on this event for the record of this hearing.

## **RUSSIA**

In Russia, even as popular anti-Semitism continues to ride the surface of public discourse, new efforts are constantly leaving their mark and testing the waters for broader application. Some examples are funded from overseas, others initiated by the Jewish community, and some sponsored by local authorities.

Project KOLOT: Women's Voices was organized by NCSJ in partnership with Jewish Women International, Project Keshet, and the Russian Jewish Congress. Initiated with a grant from the U.S. State Department, this 18-month project engaged ethnic and religious communities in addressing the issue of domestic violence in Russia, and created an advocacy model for training religious communities to participate in civil society. Working in Tula and Voronezh, we brought together police, city officials, the legal community, women's groups, human rights organization and academia to address a serious social problem. This collaboration generated a new working relationship between the ethnic and religious communities and the police and other city officials, opened police protocols to public oversight, and produced informational leaflets, bilingual training manuals, and a one-day conference with officials and activists that was the first-ever public discussion of a social issue between the local government, the police and the Voronezh Jewish community.

The "Climate of Trust" program, an ambitious "citizen-level" program of the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal, promotes ethnic and religious tolerance through U.S.-Russian exchanges among law enforcement and local officials, community leaders, activists, and educators. Components include a tolerance seminar for Russian participants, joint workshops in San Francisco and Russia, and a week-long reunion and review. As a result of this program, Regional Tolerance Centers have been established in three of Russia's seven Federal Districts; media seminar on police-community relations was held in Kazan for Internal Affairs Ministry (MVD) officials from across Russia; hate-crimes manuals are required reading for all police departments in the Republic of Karelia; and related teacher- and police cadet-training programs in several regions.

Just last week, U.S. Ambassador Alexander Vershbow addressed a Moscow conference launching a new anti-discrimination campaign in the Russia Federation. Initiated under the auspices of UCSJ: Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union, this program promises to train monitors and collect data on discriminatory practices, establish hotlines and legal clinics, and institute curricula for the justice system and schools.

The Russian Jewish Congress and Euro-Asian Jewish Congress maintain monitoring networks and are developing new programs to combat anti-Semitism. Ongoing outreach to religious and political movements is helping to build bridges. The Moscow Open University, founded by Russian Jewish Congress President Yevgeny Satanovsky, grants degrees in philology, history and a variety of other subjects, and represents one of the first serious attempts to revive Russian intellectual culture.

Last month, according to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FEOR), the Tambov Regional Administration held a roundtable discussion on extremism and tolerance. Participants in the meeting included numerous regional and local officials, as well as representatives of other ethnic communities and the mass media. The Tambov Governor condemned extremism and called for vigilance by officials at all levels.

FEOR reports that a March 2004 conference in Volgograd, on Russia's controversial Law on Religions, included representatives of 17 religious organizations and six local administrations within the Volgograd region. This conference provided the Director of the Volgograd Jewish Community Center an opportunity to challenge the Public Prosecutor on inadequate response to anti-Semitic and extremist incidents.

Acknowledging that previous results have been lacking, the prosecutor declared that preventing anti-Semitism is now a priority for his office.

In February 2004, Ambassador Vershbow joined the Chief Rabbi of Bryansk and the head of the Bryansk Regional Administration for a Jewish community-sponsored conference on xenophobia that included local representatives of the Armenian community and human rights activists. Participants, including the administrator and

Ambassador Vershbow, spoke out strongly against recent local cases of anti-Semitic newspaper articles and vandalism which are now under investigation.

Next month, the American Jewish Committee will be hosting Tatiana Sapunova, an extraordinary Russian heroine who was injured in May 2002 when she tried to remove a booby-trapped anti-Semitic sign outside Moscow. This was the first in a wave of similar incidents, involving real or mock explosives. Although the perpetrators have not been found, Russian leaders did speak out strongly, and President Vladimir Putin awarded Ms. Sapunova a medal for her bravery.

## **UKRAINE**

In Ukraine, the wheels are beginning to turn. The government has been actively enforcing a law against incitement of inter-ethnic hatred. Recent legal action against a prominent newspaper publishing virulently anti-Semitic articles has already led other likeminded publications to significantly scale back their appeals to anti-Semitism and extreme nationalism. When ethnic violence erupted in Crimea last month, top law enforcement officials immediately flew down to resolve the tensions. Major political parties have signed agreements of cooperation and support with three different umbrella organizations for national minorities. The President's Council of National Minorities also serves as an official conduit for input from religious and ethnic minorities.

The Institute for Jewish Studies, in Kyiv, promotes a range of programs as well as monitoring and reporting on anti-Semitism in the media and society. The Kyiv office of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress last year issued a report on "The Basic Tendencies of Anti-Semitism in the CIS States," with substantive submissions from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, and Armenia. Whether or not governments are able to produce such reports on their own, such publications by independent non-governmental bodies play a vital role in promoting awareness and providing a diversity of views.



The new and independent Association of Churches and Religious Organizations of Ukraine incorporates 18 faiths, including Judaism, Islam, Catholicism, and the Orthodox Church. The Association's most recent meeting, in late March, focused on fighting HIV/AIDS, rehabilitating prisoners, and Ukrainian Mufti Sheikh Ahmed Tamim's call for a joint statement condemning terrorism. Rabbi Yakov Bleich, Chief Rabbi of Ukraine, hopes the Association's work can frustrate those seeking religious justification for their terrorist acts. The Association is also identifying common ground on such complicated issues as a new draft religion law and the restitution of communal and religious properties.

One of Rabbi Bleich's partners in these endeavors is His Beatitude Lubomyr Huzar, Patriarch of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. When the Patriarch visited Washington last December, he sought our advice and assistance in fighting anti-Semitism, promoting better awareness of Jewish concerns, and using education to promote tolerance among Ukrainian Greek Catholics and others. "We have to live as real neighbors," he stressed. "This is so important for the Church," he said, because Soviet strategy sought to alienate groups from each other, by planting lies and reinforcing stereotypes. He sees anti-Semitism as part of the same Soviet approach that kept down his own church for so many decades.

Given the onetime Soviet inclination to conflate anti-Israel and anti-Semitic themes, and the contemporary use of Israeli policies to justify or excuse anti-Semitic violence particularly in Western Europe, a new art exhibition has made an important statement about the sanctity of every human life. "Children Against Terror" displays artwork by young victims of the July 2001 Dolphinarium bombing, which killed a large number of émigré youth from the former Soviet Union, and was recently exhibited in Dnepropetrovsk and Kyiv, with the participation of President Kuchma's wife Liudmila.

In Dnepropetrovsk, Chief Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki has spearheaded TKUMA, the National Center for Holocaust History Studies, together with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and other partners. TKUMA has organized a series of teacher-

training seminars, curriculum development, and a new Holocaust museum and regional network are in development. This new institution already cooperates closely with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education, research centers around the world, and the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. It is having a measurable impact on what students are learning about the legacies of the Holocaust and the costs of intolerance.

## **LITHUANIA**

In Lithuania earlier this year, when one of Lithuania's mainstream newspapers, *Respublika*, published a three-part series of anti-Semitic articles written by the editor, the Prime Minister condemned the articles and asked the Prosecutor General to investigate whether the newspaper had violated Lithuania's law against inciting ethnic hatred. Lithuania's Foreign Minister summoned the ambassadors from European Union candidates and member states and aspirants to report on Lithuania's response and reaffirm his government's commitment to zero tolerance of anti-Semitism. The Speaker of the Parliament expressed similar sentiments. We continue to follow this situation, but with confidence that Lithuania has the capacity and channels to confront anti-Semitism as lessons learned. I hope Lithuania's response in this case can be replicated in other countries.

A variety of projects in conjunction with the international Holocaust Task Force offer innovative examples of the Holocaust as teaching tool. "Surviving Ostland," a documentary video, tracks the lives of five Holocaust survivors in Lithuania, for use as a teaching resource in Lithuanian schools. A multi-phase writing competition, "My Grandparents' and Great-Grandparents' Jewish Neighbors," challenged students to record the history of the Jewish communities in their local area and published a selection of the submissions, combined with a visit to Auschwitz. In December 2002, Lithuania created a Working Group on Holocaust Education comprised of governmental and non-governmental representatives, to coordinate among elementary and secondary schools,

universities, teacher-training and continuing education, textbooks, and pedagogical methods.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I reiterate the singular importance of American leadership in fighting anti-Semitism, in building strong and pluralistic post-communist societies, and in transmitting our values to a new generation of Europeans – even as the identity and boundaries of “Europe” are undergoing a fundamental transformation. While other governments are also sponsoring educational, training and awareness programs, history continuously confirms that U.S.-funded programs show the way and set the tone for other international efforts and local initiatives, be it creating citizens’ groups, running seminars and exchanges, providing a safety net for unfiltered broadcasting, or crystallizing the region-wide consensus to fight anti-Semitism.

The new bill being sponsored by Senator Voinovich, mandating the State Department to issue a global country-by-country assessment of anti-Semitism, will likewise kindle a willingness by other governments to issue their own reports on anti-Semitism. By reporting on both the status of anti-Semitism and government responses to it, it will hold accountable those governments failing to take appropriate measures and recognize those moving forward. This is the formula that has allowed our country to lead the world toward effective enforcement of human rights standards and respect for religious freedom. Thank you for your passionate promotion of this proven strategy, in which my colleagues and I are proud to play a part.