



B'NAI B'RITH INTERNATIONAL

The Rise of Anti-Semitism in Europe

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Hearing

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Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate

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Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank you for the privilege of addressing this committee on behalf of B'nai B'rith International and its more than 110,000 members and supporters.

As Executive Vice President of B'nai B'rith, an American-based organization with members in more than 50 countries around the world, I have viewed the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe the past three and a half years with anguish and alarm.

In my 16 years at B'nai B'rith, dating back to the period prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, I have visited Europe regularly to help protect the rights of Jewish

communities on that continent. While anti-Jewish sentiment was still apparent in the half century that followed World War II, today Europe is experiencing a degree of anti-Semitism I have not seen in my adult lifetime, and the reemergence of this ugly historical phenomenon has left European Jewry feeling more vulnerable and disillusioned than at any point since the Holocaust.

Mr. Chairman, the past three and a half years has witnessed hundreds of aggressive, often violent, acts targeting Jewish individuals and institutions in Europe.

In Switzerland earlier this year, Arab students attacked a Jewish researcher in a campus elevator at the University of Geneva.

In Hungary 16 months ago, more than 100 skinheads interrupted a Chanukah candle-lighting ceremony in downtown Budapest for over an hour with shouts of "Hungary is for Hungarians, and it is better that those who are not Hungarians leave."

In Ukraine, 50 youths marched two miles to attack a synagogue in Kiev, where they beat the principal of the Lubavitch yeshiva and the son of the Chief Rabbi.

In France, where the problem has been particularly acute, scores of synagogues and Jewish day schools have been firebombed and desecrated. The French Jewish Community reported 125 anti-Semitic acts and 463 anti-Semitic threats in 2003 alone.

In Belgium, where politically motivated legal proceedings (now dismissed) were brought against Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the Chief Rabbi and a friend were assaulted and spit upon by a gang as they left a restaurant.

In Denmark, a widely circulated newspaper called *Jutland Posten* ran an advertisement featuring a radical Islamic group's offer of a \$35,000 reward for the murder of a prominent Danish Jew.

In Germany, morbid reminders of the Holocaust have appeared in the form of slogans like "Six million is not enough," which was scrawled on the walls of synagogues in both Berlin and Herford, while Jewish memorials in Berlin have been defaced with swastikas. Last fall parliamentarian Martin Hohmann delivered an appalling anti-Semitic rant to his constituents, in which he referred to Jews as a "race of perpetrators."

In Greece and Spain, newspapers have inundated their readers with anti-Semitic editorials and cartoons comparing Israeli military operations to the Holocaust and likening Prime Minister Sharon to Adolph Hitler. Such polemics have reached a fevered pitch, characterized by the Greek Jewish Community as "hysteria and anti-Semitism" masquerading as mere criticism of Israeli government policy.

These manifestations of Jew-hatred are rooted in a historical anti-Semitism that has plagued Europe for two thousand years. The long-standing accusation by the Church that Jews were "Christ-killers" fueled anti-Semitism for centuries. This theologically-based anti-Semitism gave way to the ethno-centric nationalism of the 19th and 20th Centuries, which held that Jews were racially inferior and, regardless of their efforts to integrate, inherently disloyal to the state because of their ethnic distinctness.

The by-now familiar anti-Semitism of Europe's elite has been given new life by negative public attitudes toward the Middle East conflict, and by the struggle for Holocaust restitution, as well. These problematic issues have provided anti-Semites with the intellectual fodder to rationalize and legitimate their views to their own satisfaction. Comments such as the reference by a

former French ambassador to Britain, who used a shocking expletive to describe Israel at a London cocktail party, or the criticism by a Swiss politician of “international Judaism” in the wake of negotiations with Swiss banks over Holocaust-era assets and accounts, could be seen as examples of this trend. Or the words of a Liberal member of Britain’s House of Lords: “Well, the Jews have been asking for it and now, thank God, we can say what we think at last.”

Against this backdrop of traditional anti-Semitism, the pronounced growth of Europe’s Arab and Muslim population is notably occurring. It is an increase in numbers – perhaps 20 million people residing in the 15 states of the European Union – and in ideological radicalization. France alone has six million inhabitants with roots in the Maghreb region of North Africa; much of the rampant anti-Jewish violence in France has been committed by individuals who count themselves among this population.

In Europe, these communities have immediate and regular access to Arabic-language cable TV networks like Al Jazeera; print publications; and Internet sites, all of which offer predictably one-sided, inflammatory coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict. These outlets employ primitive Jewish stereotypes in service of their anti-Zionist message, often borrowing symbols and motifs from Nazi propaganda so as to evoke the virulent anti-Semitism of *Der Sturmer*. Thus, one sees images of Jews as ghoulish, even satanic, caricatures with misshapen noses, and of Israelis bearing swastikas or drinking the blood of children. Meanwhile, Arabic editions of *Mein Kampf* sell briskly in London and other European capitals.

The radicalization of some of Europe’s Arabs and Muslims has dovetailed with the rise of the far right, whose standard-bearers – such as France’s Jean Marie Le Pen and Austria’s Joerg Haider – are generally anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim. Their nationalist rhetoric has also often featured anti-Semitism, however, and their message of opposition to European enlargement and

integration is threatening to Jews, who, like other ethnic and religious minorities, are considerably discomfited by the parochialism and xenophobia of these right-wing movements.

Even as right-wing extremism inspires fear among European Jews, the far left is creating further apprehension with the intensification of its own anti-Israel vitriol. Left-wing politicians and journalists have joined labor unions, non-governmental organizations, and human rights activists in polemical assaults on Israel that exceed the sort of legitimate policy critiques normally expected in democratic societies. Their dogma, reflexively accepted in much of Europe, begins with the premise that in the Middle East conflict the Palestinians are the victims and Israel their brutal persecutor. This view has led the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, for example, to call for a national boycott of Israeli products, as well as a ban on official contacts between union members and Israeli representatives. Meanwhile, a similar anti-Israel and anti-Jewish fervor caused the ironically-named World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa in 2001 to degenerate from a high-minded, principled gathering into an ugly, anti-Semitic hate-fest.

The decision by European Commission President Romano Prodi to co-sponsor a seminar on anti-Semitism in Brussels last month was welcomed by those of us who look to European officials to demonstrate leadership on this issue. Still, much more remains to be done. The fact that a draft resolution on racism recently introduced at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva omitted any reference to anti-Semitism as a form of discrimination is one reminder of the problem to be overcome.

Sadly, many officials in Europe persist in viewing anti-Semitism as purely a political phenomenon; once the Middle East conflict is resolved or at least subsides, violence against European Jewry will also diminish, they reason. They have refused to accept the severity of the problem, and failed to speak out

against anti-Semitism with an intensity and a conviction that the current situation demands. Former Swedish Deputy Prime Minister Per Ahlmark is one leader who has recognized the importance of combating anti-Semitism and condemning it forcefully. Unfortunately, now that the problem is more acute than it has been in decades, few current officials in Europe – German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer and France’s former Interior Minister and newly-appointed Finance Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, are two notable exceptions – have been able to replicate the level of commitment that Ahlmark has demonstrated during his public service.

A conference convened by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna last summer represented a welcome attempt by European officials, in cooperation with their American counterparts, to address the growing problem of anti-Semitism; the follow-up conference in Berlin later this month will be a further positive step. We hope that the Berlin gathering will result in ongoing mechanisms to combat anti-Semitism. For example, interior, justice, and education ministers might begin to cooperate regularly on issues such as law enforcement and tolerance training. Furthermore, the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) should institute a process for collecting data on anti-Semitic acts and should issue an annual report on its findings. Much to his credit, Senator Voinovich today introduced legislation that would require the State Department to document anti-Semitic acts around the world. We thank the Senator for his strong leadership on this issue and hope that European officials will follow his timely example.

A report released just last week by the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, however, has affirmed the sense of Jewish groups that European officials have not fully confronted the sources of anti-Semitism. After the EUMC provoked intense criticism last year by suppressing a previous report identifying Muslim radicals and left-wing pro-Palestinian supporters as the main sources of the “new anti-Semitism,” the new study makes scant reference to

Muslim antagonists, focusing instead on the role of right-wing groups. The failure of the report to speak honestly about the actual instigators in the current onslaught of anti-Semitism prompted one prominent European Jewish leader to ask, “How can we effectively fight anti-Semitism when we refuse to identify the true perpetrators?”

At a roundtable discussion following the presentation of the EU report, German legislator Ilke Schroeder stressed the Israel-related dimension of European anti-Semitism, which the study also minimized. According to Schroeder, who represents Germany in the European Parliament, the growth of anti-Semitism can be attributed in part to the “EU policy against Israel” and “anti-Zionist propaganda in the European public.”

Schroeder’s remarks point to a truth that is too often ignored in Europe: That while criticism of any government’s policies should always be expected in the democratic world, Israel is subjected to a double-standard, under which criticism of the Jewish state far oversteps the parameters invoked for all other governments – both democratic and autocratic – whose policies might come under international scrutiny. Indeed, the relentless stream of anti-Israel invective that often originates in the Middle East but consistently finds its way into European society goes considerably beyond legitimate policy debate. Such polemical attacks employ overheated, hateful rhetoric and, all too often, classic anti-Semitic images and stereotypes. One astounding example of such vitriol aired on Gaza Palestine Satellite TV less than a month ago, when a prominent Palestinian cleric said of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, “Here are the Jews today taking revenge for their grandfathers and ancestors, the sons of apes and pigs. Here are the extremist Jews demanding their rights...This is the extremist tendency of Jews. They are extremists and terrorists who deserve death, while we deserve life, since we have a just cause.”

Mr. Chairman, there can be little doubt that one-sided and unremittingly hostile attacks on Israel have contributed to a climate – much as we witnessed at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001 – in which the Jewish state is demonized and presented as a pariah among the nations. A sense of balance and historical accuracy must be restored. A poll released by the European Commission last fall underscored the severity of the problem, as the survey found that nearly 60 percent of Europeans believe that Israel is a greater threat to world peace than North Korea, Iran, or Syria.

And since many European leaders still cannot accept the gravity of present circumstances, they need to hear often and emphatically from U.S. officials, in the administration and in Congress, that anti-Semitism is again a serious problem in Europe, one that they must address. The United States has a great deal of positive influence at its disposal, and must be encouraged to use it.

The most recent round of NATO enlargement, formalized at a White House ceremony last week, has provided an example of the constructive role that the U.S. can play with regard to this matter. Thanks to America's determined insistence over the past decade, governments in Central and Eastern Europe came to understand that they needed to begin properly addressing problems related to their Holocaust-era past before they could take their place under the NATO umbrella. For example, several of the new NATO members have taken positive steps in the areas of Holocaust education and commemoration, and have either joined or applied to join the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

As the 10 Central and Eastern European countries that have undergone the NATO admission process take their place among the democratic family of nations, and as NATO continues to expand, the U.S. and the governments of those countries must remain vigilant and guard against the possibility that

progress on Holocaust-related issues will stall. America should work with those governments to vigorously combat anti-Semitism and encourage their efforts at Holocaust restitution and memory.

At the same time, the European Union should hold EU-aspirant countries to the highest possible standard as that structure prepares to enlarge at the end of this month. Germany, the host country for the upcoming OSCE conference and the country with the greatest awareness of the Holocaust and of the dangers of anti-Semitism, could have a special responsibility in this regard. And through its membership in NATO and the OSCE – its “seat at the table” of multilateral organizations centered in Europe – the U.S. should urge all EU member-states to make the problem of anti-Semitism a top priority.

As we celebrate the 350th anniversary of the American Jewish community this year, we would do well to remember and take great pride in the words of George Washington, who wrote to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island in 1790. President Washington unequivocally declared, “The government of the United States...gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.” He continued, “May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants, while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.” Washington’s message of tolerance has been a glowing inspiration to American Jews for more than 200 years, as we have drawn steady comfort from the knowledge that our government, in the earliest years of our country’s history, took a clear stand against anti-Semitism and warmly offered our community a level of support and protection that, sadly, our European counterparts have never enjoyed.

Mr. Chairman, the history of European Jewry in the past century is a tragic one. With anti-Semitism now at its greatest peak since the most tragic of all human episodes, the Holocaust, let us be mindful of this history. Let us speak

out; let us use our influence; and let us act now. History demands nothing less from us.

Thank you.