



## Statement by Ambassador Christian Strohal Director, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

### Session 2: Education on the Holocaust and on Anti-Semitism

OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and on Other Forms of Intolerance  
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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen and Colleagues

As we all know, even now, 60 years later: with the liberation of Auschwitz, anti-Semitism did not come to an end. During the recent years we saw a resurgence of anti-Semitism in many parts of the OSCE region. Recognizing the role anti-Semitism played throughout history as a major threat to freedom, the OSCE Ministerial Council in Porto, Maastricht and Sofia therefore reaffirmed the responsibility of the participating States for promoting tolerance and non-discrimination in the region and their commitments to combat anti-Semitism.

In order to specifically address the issue of anti-Semitism, the OSCE held two conferences, in Vienna in 2003 and in Berlin in 2004, on these issues. During the conferences, the participating States further committed themselves to strengthen educational programmes on combating anti-Semitism, as well as to promote remembrance of, and education on, the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Decision No. 4 on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination taken by the Maastricht Ministerial Council in 2003 significantly expanded the mandate of the ODIHR in this area. Under the Decision, my Office was tasked to assist participating States in their efforts to prevent and respond to anti-Semitism and to collect and disseminate information on best practices for preventing and responding to anti-Semitism.

The ODIHR responded to these taskings with the establishment of a new Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Programme that aims to support efforts of OSCE states and civil society to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. One of the priority areas within the newly created Programme has been the development of initiatives to support efforts to strengthen education about the Holocaust and the fight against present-day anti-Semitism. Already in 2004 the ODIHR supported the Centre for European Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow to publish the book: *Why Should We Teach About the Holocaust?*. In January 2005 a revised Polish version of this compilation of essays by Polish experts was launched and now the second edition of the English version will be presented.

In order for the ODIHR to assist participating States in their efforts to strengthen education about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, it was necessary to determine which initiatives already exist across the OSCE region and to identify those that have been effective and could be developed successfully elsewhere. The ODIHR's new publication: *Overview and Analysis of Approaches to Education on the Holocaust and on Anti-Semitism*, is meant to provide information on what is already being done and to identify good practices to support future efforts by OSCE states and civil society.

The study also identifies gaps and areas where teaching about Holocaust and anti-Semitism need to be strengthened and highlights the need to supplement Holocaust education in response to new forms of anti-Semitism. Finally it provides a number of recommendations.

The ODIHR received information from national ministries of education, national delegations of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, experts, educators, Jewish communities and NGOs in response to a questionnaire. With a response from 54 out of the 55 OSCE states, it is clear that the importance of Holocaust remembrance and education is a shared value across the OSCE region.

The analysis of the responses shows that the interest in the history of the Holocaust is growing in many OSCE countries. One such example is the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, of which 18 OSCE states are members. Additionally, Holocaust memorial days are commemorated in 33 OSCE states, personal involvement in the atrocities is often openly discussed, and a number of governments have established a task force to promote Holocaust education. Also in the vast majority of the states the Holocaust is incorporated into the subject of history, but also appears in the framework of literature, language, civic education, ethics and theology.

However, in many states, the topic of the Holocaust is not included within the fixed school curricula; in such cases teaching about the Holocaust often depends on the willingness of individual teachers. Many countries also noted that due to time limitations and the lack of appropriate teaching material, the subject is often insufficiently addressed.

Holocaust education cannot be used, either preventively or as a corrective, against all contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism. It is not enough to teach about the Holocaust in order to combat today's anti-Semitism. It is therefore important that the history of the Holocaust and present-day anti-Semitism are treated as distinct subjects.

The ODIHR, for its part, is determined to continue cooperating with each and every participating State – with government agencies, with civil society, with religious communities, and other groups – to help states meet their OSCE commitments and to assist with the implementation of educational programmes. In order to provide a first follow

up on the findings and recommendations of this study, the ODIHR will hold an expert forum in co-operation with Yad Vashem in October to develop modules for teacher training programmes and practical guidelines in order to support OSCE states in their efforts to teach about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. The ODIHR will also work in co-operation with the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam to develop an educational kit with teaching material specifically on anti-Semitism.

I would like to underline the fact that while the ODIHR's study serves to identify areas where gaps exist and where further steps are needed; implementation of existing OSCE commitments ultimately lies with states. My Office stands ready, through the projects and initiatives I have mentioned, to provide support to all states in their efforts to strengthen teaching about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism.

Thank you.