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At the outset I would like to thank the Irish Chair-in-Office for affording me the opportunity to take up this issue as its Personal Representative. I am especially grateful to ODIHR and to its department on tolerance and non-discrimination for its ongoing guidance and assistance throughout the year. And it has been particularly helpful and enlightening to have worked cooperatively with my colleagues, Judge Catherine McGuinness and Senator Adil Akhmetov.

Anti-Semitism in Public Discourse

In last year's OSCE high level conference on confronting anti-Semitism in public discourse organized in Prague expert observers described a serious and growing problem, manifest in print and traditional media and increasingly on the Internet. Long standing anti-Semitic imagery of blood libels and conspiracy theories are now combined with the demonization of Israel and frequently the conflation of Jews and Judaism with the Israeli state which serve to present a distorted and pernicious picture of Jewish life today while fomenting prejudice and group hatred. The conference concluded with a series of recommendations, including better monitoring by governments and disaggregating data to have a more accurate picture of the level of anti-Semitism, as well as practical steps that can be taken by political leaders and NGOs to alleviate the problem.

Sadly, little has changed. Anti-Semitism remains ever-present in much of the electronic media. While there may be no way to have a certain quantitative measure, no one doubts its corrosive and negative impact, especially since so few people have their own direct experiences of Jewish friends or coworkers.

By way of example, in Spain opinion surveys continue to demonstrate that a significant percentage of the population hold negative views about Jews. But this is considered to be a prejudice not based on firsthand knowledge but rather a legacy of nationalist identity politics and the anti-Israel views of the media. It is to the credit of the current Spanish Government that it is working closely with its Jewish community to find ways to change these public perceptions.

Norway offers another case. Earlier this year an official survey conducted by that country's respected Holocaust Research Center found that 38 percent of the population considered Israeli treatment of Palestinians to be analogous to the actions of the Nazis.

This was an alarming result not only for the country's small Jewish community but also for government leaders whose frequent criticism of Israel may have contributed to it.

The current Chair-in-Office has rightly focused attention on the Internet and new social media and the role they play in society, as witnessed by the Dublin Conference on Internet Freedom in June of this year. Although only briefly touched on at this gathering, more attention must be given to employing these new media as vehicles to promote tolerance and combat prejudice. And we can certainly find tools to combat the spread of anti-Semitism and other forms of hate speech without limiting the essential freedom of expression.

Jewish Community Security

We have warned that anti-Semitic public discourse is not only a problem in its own right but it can directly impact the security and well-being of Jewish communities. Such is the case today, where the physical security of Jewish communities in many OSCE participating States is imperiled. We have this year witnessed lethal attacks on Jews in several countries as well as numerous incidents of verbal harassment and physical damage to Jewish community buildings. One such attack took place only last week in Malmö, Sweden, where local authorities have long been reluctant to take responsibility.

The most persistent threat has come from right wing and neo-Nazi groups and individuals. But during this past decade attention has turned to the problems posed largely from elements in local Arab and Muslim communities. And today counter-terrorism experts also recognize that many of these same Jewish communities are potential "soft targets" for international terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and subject to the volatile triggers of the Middle East conflict and Iranian nuclear ambitions.

Jewish communities are already shouldering security needs that impose significant financial burdens. In some cases these costs can extend to as much as twenty-five percent of a community's annual budget. They require physical enhancements of schools, synagogues and other community buildings; the presence of police and security volunteers for times of worship and other communal gatherings; and the assistance of and close coordination with law enforcement officials.

Governments of the OSCE participating States have thus far responded differently to these concerns. Some have provided the necessary funds and assistance to help secure and protect vulnerable community buildings, especially schools. In some places there is a close working relationship with authorities at high levels which adequately reflects the heightened needs. But in too many places government support is limited or lacking. This may be due to financial constraints or legal restrictions. Yet, it may also be the result of a self-imposed political correctness that ignores special needs or bureaucratic indifference or the inability to see or adequately assess the threats.

For these reasons—and following the path set by last year’s Chair-in-Office sponsorship of the high level conference on confronting anti-Semitism in public discourse—we must organize a similar high level conference to confront these pressing Jewish community security needs. Delay in doing so will also have serious consequences.

Economic Stress and Heightened Anti-Semitic Expressions

As we meet Europe continues to confront dire economic problems that threaten the long term viability of the common currency and even challenge the Union itself. So far in even the most vulnerable states mainstream government leaders and parties have been united in their resolve to maintain a steady, centrist course. But this stress and the real and perceived economic hardships imposed on large numbers of citizens have also bolstered support for extremist parties that regularly play with racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic themes. The Jobbik Party in Hungary and the Golden Dawn Party in Greece now join the more established National Front in France and Freedom Party in Austria in garnering support in these difficult times. Each may offer up a different primary target of group hatred depending on local conditions and prejudices, but all find it useful to weave an anti-Semitic thread in their respective tapestries. And it is perhaps more than coincidence that each one flirts with Holocaust revisionism.

Jewish Ritual Practice Endangered

Local political initiatives in a number of countries have sought to limit or restrict the freedom to perform ritual circumcisions or sought to impose bans that would prohibit the kosher slaughter of animals. Ostensibly advocates are motivated by special concerns for the protection of children or the rights of animals, but they may also mask anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiments. And in much of the public reaction and Internet postings there is no mask: the anti-Semitism is quite explicit.

By way of example, last year in the Netherlands a small animal rights party proposed legislation that would effectively ban ritual slaughter as performed by Jews and Muslims. It drew significant support from anti-Muslim prejudice and came close to passage. Switzerland and Norway are among those countries which have long-standing bans on kosher slaughter, the direct legacy of an anti-Semitic past. Their small Jewish communities have accommodated themselves to these restrictions, but growing Muslim populations pose new challenges.

Earlier this year a German court in Cologne decreed that ritual circumcision as performed by Jews and Muslims should be outlawed. National leaders in Berlin quickly declared that such a ban would be unacceptable, and they have drafted legislation intended to guarantee this millennia-old religious practice. However, a growing public debate featuring strong voices opposed to circumcision suggests that passage of the legislation cannot be assured.

In each instance one might first assume that basic guarantees of religious freedom, enshrined in national constitutions and European basic law, would easily overturn these imposed or potential restrictions. Yet such is not necessarily the case when we speak of increasingly secular societies where respect for religion in general has steadily declined and where understanding of Judaism and Islam is often lacking.

Recommendations

Ten years have now passed since the OSCE first took up the problem of a resurgent anti-Semitism in Europe and resolved to organize a first conference. There has been steady organizational progress—in the expressed commitment of governments, in the role and expertise of ODIHR, and in subsequent expert and high level conferences. But the problems persist and in some areas they have worsened.

1. The physical security of Jewish communities may be the most pressing issue we face today. We need to highlight the good practices in some participating States that are being employed and strategize with Jewish community leaders and appropriate government authorities to see that they are replicated elsewhere. This can be best achieved through a high level conference.
2. At the same time that the OSCE looks to restate its commitment to media freedom and as it considers how it may update these principles for the digital age, it cannot ignore the parallel challenge we face in confronting anti-Semitism and other forms of hate on the Internet. There are numerous tools available that can do this without out jeopardizing the freedom of expression, and we need to find ways to highlight them and support their use.
3. An early hallmark of ODIHR's contribution to combating anti-Semitism was the development of innovative educational materials tailored to individual countries. These materials need to be updated to take advantage of today's interactive and tech savvy teaching techniques. And they still require the support of governments to help fund and implement them.