

Presentation to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

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I and my two colleagues returned Friday from Athens. During the time of our brief visit an antifascist activist was murdered by a supporter of the Golden Dawn Party. We watched in real time as the public and the government reacted. The thuggish behavior of this neo-Nazi party was well established, terrorizing immigrants and eager for street battles with leftist groups. The rhetoric of their MPs in Parliament—they have eighteen—is openly racist and anti-Semitic. In the economically stressed environment of Greece they have thrived. Opinion polls suggest that if elections were held today they would double that number of seats. Admittedly they are attracting votes from many people who do not necessarily share their extremist views. Like Hamas, the Palestinian terrorist group that controls Gaza and that won support by providing social services in a harsh environment, Golden Dawn aids pensioners walking through unsafe neighborhoods and distributes food packages to hungry Greeks. They win their votes and those of others who just want to protest the austere measures imposed by the ruling parties.

Golden Dawn leaders openly deny the Holocaust and espouse anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. One MP read from the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Parliament. Jews are routinely blamed for the country's economic ruin. Greece's Jewish community estimated at 5,000 is too small and visibly unidentifiable to serve as a physical target for the neo-Nazi party, but they are justifiably anxious. Cemeteries and memorials have been desecrated and security has been beefed up at community buildings.

By most accounts until now the government was unwilling or unable to rein in the Golden Dawn. New anti-racist legislation was drafted months ago but it has not been presented to Parliament. Police have had limited resources to deal with growing crime caused in some degree by large numbers of illegal immigrants, the most recent wave arriving from the conflict in Syria. Some civil society observers maintain that many policemen themselves are supporters of the neo-Nazi party thus hampering their effectiveness.

But last week's murder appeared to have awakened people to the real dangers that lie ahead if strong measures are not taken now, and the Greek government has promised to act.

Golden Dawn may be the most notable example of an extremist, neo-Nazi party in Europe gaining support and winning votes, and thereby bringing the hateful racist and anti-Semitic rhetoric of street corners into the halls of Parliament. But it is not the only one. We can see a similar pattern with the Jobbik Party in Hungary and Svoboda in Ukraine among others. Regardless of the numbers or influence of Jews in those countries, anti-Semitism is a staple of their ideology. In fact since each of these extremist parties have strong nationalist agendas there is very little that they have in common except for the common thread of anti-Semitism that is woven through them.

Earlier this year I paid visits to France and Belgium, where the dangers confronting Jewish communities are somewhat different. Anti-Semitism was once the purview of right wing movements, and that has not entirely disappeared. But by nearly all anecdotal accounts the main source for anti-Semitic incidents, particularly physical and verbal harassment, comes from elements in those countries' Arab and Muslim communities. Many people have assumed that these incidents are in some way rooted in the Middle East conflict, and that Jews are the more convenient target for venting anti-Israel animus. It is true that events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have triggered a spike in anti-Semitic incidents in Europe. But one limited survey conducted earlier this year compared Muslim and non-Muslim youth in Belgium and found that Muslim youth held dramatically higher anti-Jewish sentiments. This should not be surprising when one recognizes that the Arab world has become the greatest purveyor of anti-Semitic books and videos, and much of it is easily imported into the Arabic speaking communities of Europe.

The increase in anti-Semitic incidents is well-documented. According to the French Interior Ministry 55 percent of all violent racist incidents in France in 2012 were anti-Semitic in nature. Belgium's Interior Ministry has acknowledged the increased dangers by raising the threat level of synagogues and other Jewish community buildings, which is now equivalent to that ascribed to the American and Israeli embassies. A survey conducted last year by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights of Jews in nine EU countries found that over twenty percent say they avoid visiting Jewish sites or attending Jewish events for fear of encountering anti-Semitism.

French authorities reportedly made fifty arrests last year in cases of serious anti-Semitic attacks. Of those, ten were identified as being carried out by neo-Nazis. The other eighty percent are not labeled, as the law prohibits identification on the basis of race or religion or ethnicity. Since the old left/right classifications no longer work, the Interior Ministry has adopted a new and ambiguous term, "inter-communal tension," to apply to these incidents. France is not alone in its reluctance to identify this source of anti-Semitism coming from Arab and Muslim communities, who themselves are frequently victims of racial prejudice. Yet unless this is acknowledged and examined it is hard to believe that any real progress can be made in

addressing the problem and devising successful tools for changing attitudes. And in the meantime Jewish communities remain uncertain that their governments are truly committed to maintain their safety and security and value their place in society.

In June of this year the OSCE Chair-in-Office and ODIHR organized a conference on Jewish community security in Berlin. It was recognition that in many countries the physical protection of Jews and their institutions has become paramount. Security is an outsized financial burden that can sometimes demand as much as a quarter of a community's budget. Communities must choose between religious and educational services or physical protection, sometimes with dire consequences as last year's shooting at a Jewish school in Toulouse demonstrated. The June conference brought together Jewish leaders and government authorities and highlighted good examples of cooperative support. ODIHR has prepared a comprehensive summary report of the conference together with recommendations, which is now being released.

Earlier this summer the Polish Parliament voted down legislation that would have permitted the continuation of Jewish ritual slaughter, providing an exemption to an animal rights law. The Jewish Community maintains that its religious rights, guaranteed by the government, are being violated, and the matter will now be decided by the constitutional court. This follows on efforts in other countries to ban or restrict ritual slaughter, an elemental obligation in both Judaism and Islam. Last year a Cologne court ruled that the ritual circumcision of minors should be banned in Germany. Thus, another basic precept for both Jews and Muslims came under attack. German Parliamentary legislation ultimately insured that the practice would be allowed. But we can expect further efforts in Europe to restrict or eliminate both circumcision and ritual slaughter. In most cases those spearheading efforts are animal rights activists or advocates of child rights; they are not anti-Semites. But anti-Semitism frequently surfaces in the public debate and discussion. And the future of Jewish life in Europe is surely challenged if they succeed in their goals.

Next year will mark the tenth anniversary of the OSCE Berlin Conference and the Berlin Declaration on anti-Semitism that was presented there. It was a seminal moment in the recognition that anti-Semitism had reemerged in Europe and posed a genuine threat to the security and wellbeing of participating states and their citizens. It led in turn to a growing number of commitments in the area of monitoring and combating anti-Semitism and educational programs to address it. Within the OSCE it brought about the creation of ODIHR's Department on Tolerance and non-Discrimination and important initiatives in training police and prosecutors and confronting both anti-Semitism and other forms of racism and intolerance. But with all of the very real progress it has not "solved" the problem of anti-Semitism, which sadly is very much with us.

Important anniversaries can be a useful means of looking back and looking forward. In 2014 we should find the opportunity perhaps at another similarly high level gathering to review, reexamine and recommit our efforts to confront the scourge of anti-Semitism.