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Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
Miklós Haraszti
Intervention at the Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism
29 April 2004

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Who would have thought that on the eve of expansion of the EU we would still be discussing anti-Semitism and how to combat it? This could be entirely bad news, but the good part is that we are discussing this in Berlin, in the very city where the anti-Semites of the 30s pillaged and murdered.

Germany, thanks to its great post-war writers and its energetic young democrats, did a great job in what now, even in Hungary, is called by its long German name: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Communism, with its seemingly anti-fascist posture, only delayed a coming to terms with the past, so in the *new* democracies of Europe the bulk of that hard work still has to be delivered.

Since the latest wave of hatred manifested itself, we have had to understand that fighting anti-Semitism would not succeed by fighting only the anti-Semitism of the past. For example, my country, Hungary, does very well when it commemorates the 60th anniversary of the Holocaust with a museum opening in the presence of all mainstream political leaders.

But it might be equally educational to look at what many of the best writers of the country did in this anniversary year. They quit a Writers' Union that could not decide to condemn a fellow writer, who gave an anti-Jewish speech at a rally. By the way, at that same rally, as if to translate the speaker's somewhat coded words, the participants burned the Israeli flag.

The Nazis did not hide behind coded words; prejudice did not masquerade as political correctness. With the establishment of Israel as the first democratic state in the Middle East, with the history of the Holocaust behind Europe, anti-Semitism adapted to the new reality.

But what is being called the "New Anti-Semitism" these days is not really new. It was developed in the 1960's and '70s. It happened when the Soviet Union ordered its satellites to withdraw recognition from Israel. At that time, the terrorist organizations fighting against the existence of Israel in the name of Palestine were

called Marxist-Leninist, but they did exactly what their purportedly religious successors of today do: they cruelly massacred innocent Israeli civilians. Their training camps and hiding places were all over the Warsaw Pact countries. I remember vividly the campaigns when, in Central and Eastern Europe's workplaces and schools, "voluntary" donations had to be paid to support the Terrorists.

It was then that "anti-Zionism" was invented. The new coded phrase to denominate the Jews was "supporters of the Israeli aggressors" or simply, "Israeli aggressors". The single greatest official state action against Jews since the end of WW2 was taken by the Polish Government in 1968, when thousands of Jewish persons were fired from their jobs and even squeezed out of the country - all in the name of fighting Zionism.

There is nothing new in the denial of democratic solidarity with the State of Israel; in turning an insensitive eye when it is menaced by open calls of annihilation from old-style anti-Semites, and in equating its eventual political or humanitarian failures with the sins of Nazism.

I don't believe that the present-day manifestations of Israel-bashing in the press would amount to a New Anti-Semitism, but I am sure the symptoms do indicate a "New Insensitivity"

My Office recently issued a report about the role of the media in Kosovo in the mid-March inter-ethnic violence. We found that inaccurate and sensationalist television reporting about the death of three Kosovar Albanian children, which was presented as a brutal, deliberate, ethnically motivated killing by Serbs, probably played a crucial role in the outbreak of the violence that took 19 lives.

Please compare this case to the cartoon in a British newspaper which depicted Prime Minister Sharon devouring a child. Critics saw this as a clear reference to the ancient blood libel accusation. But the supposed anti-Semitism of the artist is less important than the apparently missing sense of political responsibility in the editors of that paper, and the even more missing sense of responsibility at the British Political Cartoon Society, which awarded that "work of art" the title: "Cartoon of the Year 2003".

If such a caricature were to be published anywhere in the volatile post-Yugoslav region, or in the Caucasus region, the OSCE would be up in arms, and rightly so. The problem with blood libel accusations today is not that they resemble anti-Semitic patterns, but that they can kill, almost literally, by supporting already-violent sentiments both in the Middle East and inside Britain.

Let me finish this by calling on the press to fight the “New Insensitivity”. All we have to do is keep caring, relentlessly.

Thank you.