

## OSCE Conference on Antisemitism Berlin April 27<sup>th</sup> / 28<sup>th</sup> 2004

**Workshop "Promoting Tolerance: Media, Internet"**  
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**Chairman Anti Defamation (ADL) Committee of Bnai Brith Zurich**

**Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

I have the pleasure to inform you about a project of the Anti-Defamation Committee of Bnai Brith, Zurich:

### **a scientific report on the portrayal of Jews in the Swiss-German Media.**

The "Center for Research on the Public Sphere and Society of the University of Zurich" undertook for us a major study to analyze **the image of Jews, Judaism and the Jewish religion in the Swiss-German mass media.**

The analysis deliberately avoids classifying media statements about Jews as "anti-Semitic", since this would presuppose an agreed-upon definition of anti-Semitism. Instead, the classifications were grouped along the following characteristics:

1. does a characterization engender empathy (is a minority depicted as "persecuted"?) or coolness (are Israeli settlers shown as "privileged"?)
2. whether or not this view was corrected by the relevant media - for example by including contrary opinions or by direct commentary
3. the study took into account whether a characterization was ascribed to individuals, groups or the entire collective - for example "the" Jews or "the" Israelis

It is particularly contentious when a negative attitude is either endorsed or not corrected in media coverage, and/or when it is applied to the entire ethnic or religious group.

In the framework of this project eleven daily and weekly papers and three electronic media programs were analyzed during a twelve-month period from December 1, 2002 until December 1, 2003.

The results showed that Jews are portrayed predominantly in positive terms. They are frequently depicted as victims, both as a historically persecuted minority and as targets of current threats, notably terrorism. On the whole, the study found little to no evidence for classic anti-Jewish stereotypes, leading the study's authors to conclude that such stereotypes constitute a taboo in the media. Among the few exceptions is the occasional portrayal of Jewish-American organizations as "influential".

**Korrespondenzadresse:**

When Jews as a group are viewed negatively, the media usually correct this image, often by reference to the history of Jewish suffering. In the context of the Middle East, however, Jews are portrayed as aggressors, and this image is reinforced - explicitly or implicitly - by the media. Classifying Jews as aggressors or perpetrators engenders rejection, and such a reaction is re-enforced by typecasting them as privileged and imperialist, mostly also within the context of reporting about the Middle East. Such portrayals are rarely corrected and often even endorsed by a paper or electronic broadcaster. A similar negative response follows depictions of Jews as inflating charges of anti-Semitism. On issues involving the Middle East, Jews are depicted as using the charge of anti-Semitism in an inflationary manner in order to counteract or undercut criticism of Israeli policies.

Summarizing the study we can say: except in the Middle Eastern context, Jews are generally portrayed empathetically, or at least not negatively. However, when the media report on the Arab-Israeli conflict, Jews tend to appear in a negative light – especially “Jewish settlers”, “the Jewish State” or even “Jews” as a group. This is clearly the most problematic area in the portrayal of Jews in the Swiss-German media. Negative typecasting of Jews have virtually disappeared, except in the context of the Middle East conflict, where negative images predominate. Furthermore, in letters to the editor, Jews have a somewhat more negative image than in other sections of newspapers.

Perhaps, as a counterbalance to criticizing Jews in the Middle East context, the media may overcompensate by not criticizing Jewish actors on other issues (e.g. a controversial decision by a Jewish-American organization to award an honor to the Italian prime minister was largely ignored by the Swiss media). The study's authors suggest that this might reflect an overly politically correct attitude towards Jews and Jewish topics, which “cannot be in the interest of the Jewish community”, and recommend opening a constructive dialogue.

Bnai Brith Zurich presented the results of this project to a large group of media representatives and opinion leaders. This resulted in a wide and very positive media coverage, which has proven to us that scientifically based media analysis are a very good tool to open constructive dialogues with editors of major news papers and electronic medias.

A summary of the report is available here at the conference. The unabridged version – unfortunately only in German language - is can be downloaded from the internet at: <http://www.anti-defamation.ch/dokumente.php>

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