



## **Statement**

**by Lesley Weiss**

### **Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs for NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia**

at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am Lesley Weiss, Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs for NCSJ, Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia. NCSJ has participated in the Helsinki process since the process was founded in 1975. The Helsinki Accords empowered human rights activists in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to challenge tyranny. Today the OSCE is a vital resource for human rights. That is why I am pleased to offer this intervention focusing on the role of governments in responding to anti-Semitic and hate-motivated crimes, a dimension in which NCSJ has worked closely with parliamentarians, officials and organizations in the United States, Europe and the former Soviet Union.

As an umbrella organization that includes nearly 50 national American Jewish organizations and over 300 local community groups, including a number of those participating here, NCSJ would like to associate itself with the statements of those partner organizations.

Anti-Semitism remains a significant problem throughout the successor states and across Europe. The focus of our organization is on issues related to the Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union. The Jews in the former Soviet Union today constitute the third largest Jewish community in the world, and historically represents one of the most troubled ones. The issue of anti-Semitism is deeply rooted in the former Soviet Union. During Soviet times, Jews encountered institutional or state-sponsored anti-Semitism that blocked their opportunities for advancement and Jews were forbidden to engage in Jewish cultural and religious life.

Today, we recognize the progress achieved since the breakup of the Soviet Union, but we are also aware that the post-Soviet Jewish community remains vulnerable to political, economic, and social instabilities. While state sponsored anti-Semitism has been virtually eliminated, one of the most negative developments of recent years has been an upsurge in popular anti-Semitism visible and vocal at the street level, in segments of the press, academia, the intelligentsia and amongst ultra-nationalist extremists.

Like other Western observers of the former Soviet Union, the advocacy movement on behalf of the Jews in the former Soviet Union remains steadfast and deeply concerned because of the continued turbulence in that region of the world. Progress towards rule of law and democracy is finding root in some areas, but in other regions there seems to regression. As democracy-building and free market economies try to take shape in this environment of confusion and uncertainty, the future stability and security of the Jewish population remains a concern.

It is incumbent upon us all to pursue a just and secure life free of anti-Semitism, live in the former Soviet Union Since the collapse of the USSR, the NCSJ and the American Jewish community have been closely following the process of reform. The security and well being of Jews in the FSU is linked with

the successful democratization of the region. We are hopeful that positive change will evolve from a commitment to democratic values versus political expediency.

We see progress. For example in Russia, Alexander Koptsev, who in January 2006 stabbed nine worshipers in a Moscow synagogue, was sentenced to 16 years in prison for attempted murder and inciting racial hatred. This was a positive step and appropriate use of the Russian law concerning the incitement of religious, ethnic and racial hatred. We encourage the Russian Federation and the successor states to undertake a comprehensive and sustained campaign to counteract the actions and voices of hate and intolerance. This campaign must be waged through the implementation of legislation, law enforcement, and education. Only a 'zero tolerance' approach to anti-Semitism, as well as racism and xenophobia in general, will set the countries of the former Soviet Union on a path to a society free of hatred and ethnic strife.

Other positive examples are the three international conferences that were held in Kazakhstan, which attracted heads of state and other officials, and religious and ethnic leaders from across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Prominent representatives, of Judaism and diverse streams of Christianity and Islam, attended these conferences. With the involvement of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, these events generated positive publicity as well as joint declarations against terrorism and religious extremism, and in support of tolerance and inter-ethnic understanding and cooperation.

In Ukraine, the government has spoken out forcefully against anti-Semitism, re-enforced by President Yushchenko at the recent 65<sup>th</sup> commemoration of Babi Yar. The Ukrainian government has been actively enforcing a law against incitement of inter-ethnic hatred. The President's Council of National Minorities also serves as an official conduit for input from religious and ethnic minorities. Non-governmental organizations also play an important role through their various

publications. The Institute for Jewish Studies, in Kyiv, promotes a range of programs as well as monitoring and reporting on anti-Semitism in the media and society. The Kyiv office of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress issues an annual report on “The Basic Tendencies of Anti-Semitism in the CIS States,” with substantive submissions from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, and Armenia. Whether or not governments are able to produce such reports on their own, such publications by independent non-governmental bodies play a vital role in promoting awareness and providing a diversity of views.

Unfortunately, these beneficial periodicals are not the only ones being written in Ukraine. Over the last four years the number of anti-Semitic publications has grown steadily and rapidly. Most of them are initiated by MAUP, the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management, one of the largest private universities in Ukraine. Starting in the spring of 2002, MAUP and its president Georgy Schokin unleashed aggressive anti-Semitic propaganda through a series of books, articles, brochures, and sponsored conferences. Furthermore, in a conference in 2005 entitled “Zionism as the biggest threat to modern civilization”, MAUP came up with a resolution calling for the deportation of Jews from Ukraine. The influence of MAUP in the academic, economic and political sphere of Ukraine, the high level of education possessed by the leaders of this establishment, and the ferocity of their anti-Semitic campaign are all reasons for serious concern. We are pleased that the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Sciences has decided to deny MAUP University official recognition of 4655 diplomas issued to MAUP graduates in 2006. The ministry based this decision on blatant violations of the license agreement on the part of MAUP. According to reports from Kyiv, in addition to the eight regional offices that have been shut down, another 30 regional MAUP offices are to be closed within the next few months. Despite these important moves, more action to battle anti-Semitism is required.

The OSCE, in its effort to fight the use and proliferation of global anti-Semitism, can provide useful models to its member agencies through ODIHR and the Special Representative on Anti-Semitism. NCSJ and its member agencies will continue to work with the OSCE to combat the unfortunate rise of global anti-Semitism. Only through a joint effort to provide the public with reliable information, consistent monitoring, and effective education and training, can the threat of anti-Semitism be alleviated. We urge the continuation of the OSCE Personal Representative of the Chair-in-Office for Combating Anti-Semitism and that a follow-up Conference on Anti-Semitism take place in 2007.