



**Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia,  
Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia**

**“Anti-Semitism in Europe”**

**Testimony of Mark B. Levin, Executive Director**

**NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia**

**Before the Subcommittee on European Affairs**

**Committee on Foreign Relations**

**United States Senate**

**October 22, 2003**

[www.ncsj.org](http://www.ncsj.org)

Mr. Chairman, Senator Biden and Members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today. I am joined here today by my colleagues, Shai Franklin, NCSJ's Director of Governmental Relations, and Lesley Weiss, NCSJ's Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs.

As you know, NCSJ is an umbrella of nearly 50 national organizations and over 300 local community federations and community councils across the United States. We coordinate and represent the organized American Jewish community on advocacy relating to the former Soviet Union, and our membership includes the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, United Jewish Communities, and many other well-known agencies devoted to promoting tolerance and combating prejudice and anti-Semitism around the world. This combined experience and expertise has significantly informed my comments to you today.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin by recognizing the leadership you have demonstrated since assuming the helm of this Subcommittee, as reflected by your initiative in calling this hearing. We have long appreciated Senator Biden's leadership on our issues of concern, particularly this body's consistent bipartisan commitment to combating anti-Semitism. I must also pay tribute to Senator Voinovich, whose personal role during the past two years – including his service on the U.S. Helsinki Commission – has been instrumental in securing concerted international coordination on today's topic.

My testimony will focus on governmental responses to anti-Semitism, region-wide efforts at coordination, and how the United States can play and is playing an instrumental role.

A major feature of European history – both recent and distant – is deep-seated anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish violence. The upsurge of anti-Semitism in Europe during the past two years is often attributed to Muslim or Middle Eastern communities. The responsibility for law enforcement and shaping public attitudes, however, resides with European society as a whole, with European governments, and with multilateral security and humanitarian agencies. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States Senate has actively addressed European anti-Semitism with the understanding that European stability is incompatible with unchecked popular or state-sponsored anti-Semitism.

Mr. Chairman, American leadership has already advanced the campaign against European anti-Semitism in significant ways. Europe's instinctive tendency to address anti-Semitism as a mere manifestation of broader xenophobia and bigotry, rather than as a distinct and separate form of human rights violation, is a misreading of history. Rather than an outgrowth of generalized ethnic hatred, anti-Semitism is the medieval and modern prototype for the racial and ethnic bigotry that has sadly become diversified throughout the continent. Only by addressing anti-Semitism as a unique phenomenon can Europeans begin to correct the social ills of broad-based xenophobia.

By facilitating a new consensus to support concerted action, primarily through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United States Government and Congress have begun breaking down the excuses for inaction. Against the backdrop of U.S. leadership in

the Middle East crisis, and given the history of U.S. leadership during the decades of Cold War confrontation, the Senate has an opportunity to continue the U.S. role in ensuring respect for human rights at home and abroad – focusing on concern for renewed anti-Semitic violence in Western Europe and the former Soviet Union.

In highlighting the efforts by Members of Congress and the United States Government, this Committee can help dispel the myth that anti-Semitism is a consequence of Israeli or American policies, that anti-Semitism is somehow an outgrowth of newer strains of intolerance, or that combating anti-Semitism need not be a priority for nations seeking to emulate the progress of Western nations.

Fittingly, it is such newly democratic nations that have stepped to the forefront in this cooperative effort. Among the post-Soviet states, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Georgia and others demonstrated their early support. Bulgaria, Poland and Romania, reemerging from decades of Soviet domination, have also led the way with the United States, Germany, and a few other Western nations. Some of these post-Communist societies still harbor endemic anti-Semitism, but they are taking steps to confront and neutralize it, to educate the public and protect minorities from popular or politically motivated threats. Most still have a distance to travel along this path, but they realize the imperative. They also realize the necessity of transnational cooperation, and have supported the effort to open a new track of the historic Helsinki process, one devoted to combating anti-Semitism.

Last June, at the first-ever OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism, governments began to share information, ideas and commitments for combating anti-Semitism at home and throughout the OSCE region, under the chairmanship of the Netherlands. They did so within a new framework that implicitly recognizes anti-Semitism as a distinct human rights concern and a real threat to regional stability. This historic step would have been impossible without strong support from Capitol Hill, including Senator Voinovich at a critical point, and in turn the commitment and talents of American diplomats including former Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Randolph Bell, and Stephan Minikes, U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE. The leadership and presence of former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani set the tone for delegations from the other 54 participating states.

Concretizing this break with “business as usual” means providing an effective mandate through this winter’s OSCE Ministerial Council, setting a high profile for next year’s Berlin conference on anti-Semitism, assigning a specific responsibility within the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and ongoing consultation and oversight among participating States. It is vital to begin collecting information and proposals from all 55 OSCE participating states now, so that data on anti-Semitic hate crimes, constructive legislation and education and media initiatives can be assembled in time for next spring’s conference in Berlin. It is vital that the United States sustain this momentum with high-level representation at the Maastricht Ministerial in December, and by giving all possible support to the new and well-qualified Special Envoy, Ambassador-Designate Edward O’Donnell.

## FORMER SOVIET UNION

Government response to anti-Semitism in the successor states has been improving during the past few years. Several countries with a long history of anti-Semitism have undertaken efforts to implement laws against incitement, to speak out against anti-Semitism, and to promote research and education regarding Jewish heritage, the Holocaust, and tolerance.

While official or state anti-Semitism has been relegated to the past, political anti-Semitism by individual parliamentarians and local officials persists. Even leaders who speak out strongly against anti-Semitic rhetoric or activities often avoid repudiating anti-Semitic speeches by political allies and challengers. We hold the leaders responsible, not for the sentiments of their constituents but for their commitment to impacting those sentiments. To be truly free societies, whether in France or Russia, anti-Semitism cannot be considered a risk-free political device. There must be consequences, be they legal, political, or social.

In past elections in Russia and Ukraine, media and politicians have been tempted to resort to anti-Semitic appeals. As both countries prepare to enter a new cycle of national elections, we look to the leadership of these countries, their parliaments and political parties to act responsibly and to strongly denounce any appeals to anti-Semitism. Delaying a response until after the election only reinforces the impression that anti-Semitism is a safe campaign tactic.

Even in countries like Ukraine, where public anti-Semitism is rare and the state has supported the Jewish community revival and prosecutes perpetrators of anti-Semitic violence, officials still tend to classify such crimes as “hooliganism” rather than anti-Semitism.

Belarus has a mixed record, reflecting the need for more involvement by the national government in encouraging regional and local authorities to address issues of vandalism, cemetery desecration, and construction over Jewish graves: at Grodno and Mozer, where new construction is unearthing Jewish remains as I speak; at the Yama memorial in the Minsk ghetto, where vandals defaced prominent memorial sculptures and plaques; at the Kuropaty gravesite, where then-President Clinton dedicated a memorial bench that has since been damaged twice; at Gomel, where Jewish remains are being unearthed to make room for new Christian burials. These difficulties are only compounded by a sweeping new religion law, which enshrines the Orthodox Church as the pre-eminent faith.

Dr. Yevgeny Satanovsky, President of the Russian Jewish Congress, recently complained that anti-Semitic media and extremists from Western Europe are inspiring a new wave of anti-Semitism in his country. Russia certainly has its own indigenous forms of anti-Semitism, but Western European nations must recognize that anti-Semitism is a cross-border phenomenon, particularly as the European Union consolidates and expands. And Western neglect and excuses for popular anti-Semitism send a dangerous signal to the East that anti-Semitism is acceptable in modern society. Fortunately, U.S. leadership and post-Communist vigilance are beginning to challenge the complacency and remind governments of their obligations to their citizens and neighbors.

What positive example can Western Europe offer to its eastern neighbors? Surely, many cultural and political accomplishments come to mind. Yet, when it comes to sensitivity on minority issues, sadly, Western Europe has taken too much for granted. Thus it is not surprising that Russians can defend restrictions on minority faiths by pointing to comparable practices in France, Belgium, and Germany. Nor is it surprising when successor states defend votes in favor of anti-Israel and seemingly anti-Semitic United Nations resolutions by claiming to follow ‘the Western European example.’

Mr. Chairman, when I testified before a similar hearing of this Subcommittee in April 2000, I quoted former Czech President Vaclav Havel, who has written: “The time of hard, everyday work has come, a time in which conflicting interests have surfaced, a time for sobering up, a time when all of us – and especially those in politics – must make it very clear what we stand for.” Havel and I were both referring to the so-called “new” democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, but events of the past two years necessitate a broader reading.

We do not judge post-Communist governments by what they found among the shards of Soviet tyranny, we judge them by their commitment to moving forward. We hold them accountable for efforts to condition public attitudes through education and public statements, and we challenge them to enact and enforce laws to protect minorities and others. How can we afford to hold Western governments to a lower standard?

At a March 2002 conference in Bucharest, organized by the American Jewish Committee, Latvian Jewish leader Gregory Krupnikov remarked, “There is no state anti-Semitism. Obviously there is some level of public ‘street’ anti-Semitism, although it does not differ from the degree of anti-Semitism that typically exists in Europe.” Fortunately, Latvia has not experienced “the degree of anti-Semitism” prevailing in Western Europe during the many months since the Bucharest conference. Latvia, so long under the yoke of Soviet occupation and the site of the worst kinds of atrocities during the Holocaust, was among the few courageous nations in Durban to vocally denounce the anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish draft platform of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism. However, we are disappointed that wartime pro-Nazi military units are still being honored with monuments and marches, including the recent dedication of a new memorial at the Lestene cemetery with the participation of government officials.

In the former Soviet republics, we need to continue supporting programs that foster tolerance and understanding, public campaigns to lift the cloak of legitimacy from those resorting to anti-Semitism, official condemnations of actions or statements that diminish the humanity of any individual or group, and legal and institutional commitment to this cause.

According to the latest report by the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS and Baltic States, anti-Semitism is an ongoing trend to which the authorities are responding with increasing consistency. In Bryansk, Russia, where the municipality hired security guards for a Jewish school, they proved ineffective in stopping anti-Semitic vandalism and the community has retained private security. In Novgorod, a newspaper editor is now under investigation for inciting national discord during last year’s mayoral election. In Volgograd, the regional administration sponsors a newspaper that regularly publishes anti-Semitic articles. In Estonia, a

local court convicted a woman for selling a newspaper published by the banned Russian National Unity movement.

Behind these results lie decades of hard work by this Committee and many U.S. Government bodies, and by non-governmental organizations and their counterparts in the former Soviet Union. This work is far from complete, and we must not allow the latest Western European eruption of anti-Semitism to make us forget about the very real and ongoing societal undercurrent of anti-Semitism which persists, especially in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova.

Having already addressed the mechanism for regional cooperation in fighting anti-Semitism, I would like to list the key lessons we have learned in the former Soviet Union:

- The need to monitor incidents and attitudes, practices and policies, in the successor states has never been so obvious in light of the alarming developments to their west. Monitoring empowers local activists, it compels our diplomats to become experts and advocates in this area, and it reminds foreign governments and societies that these issues are integral to the Western culture they seek to emulate. Sharing this data on a regional level promotes additional awareness and coordination.
- Legislation to counter extremism and racial violence is also gaining support in the region, as evidenced by the new Russian law. At the same time, unfortunately laws that set up two classes of religion – traditional and non-traditional – or abdicate decision-making authority to local officials give further credence to the notion that the state can decide which religious groups are legitimate and which are not.
- Without enforcement of laws on the national and local levels, obviously, no legislation can have an impact. This requires active supervision by senior officials, as well as training programs for police, government workers and community leaders in tolerance and in combating hate crimes.
- Without an effective court system, either violators go free or public opinion doubts the fairness of their sentencing. This may be the most neglected facet of efforts to reduce outbreaks of anti-Semitism and xenophobia, and to transform post-Soviet societies. If judges cannot become role models, their statements and decisions ultimately have little impact.
- Public education efforts are gaining momentum, particularly in the Baltic states, which are teaching their children the lessons of the Holocaust, and the United States would do well to redouble support for such efforts. To be truly successful and far-reaching, these efforts must be undertaken at the earliest possible age, but should also encompass opportunities for adult learning.
- The ‘bully pulpit’ is not only available to presidents. Public statements by government leaders at every level are indispensable to motivating society, bureaucracies, and

legislators. Official condemnation of anti-Semitism and calls for greater protection of minorities help shape public attitudes and reduce ambiguity.

- Religious leaders must also take responsibility. The Lithuanian Catholic Church condemned anti-Semitism three years ago at a bishops' conference, and expressed regret that during the German occupation "a portion of the faithful failed to demonstrate charity to the persecuted Jews, did not grasp any opportunity to defend them, and lacked the determination to influence those who aided the Nazis." Together with Jewish Women International and Russian-based partners, NCSJ recently concluded a State Department grant to promote tolerance within religious communities in two Russian cities.

## U.S. POLICY

In large part due to Congressional initiative, the U.S. Government has multiple channels for addressing anti-Semitism overseas. Among these are the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, or Helsinki Commission, which is headquartered in the U.S. Congress; the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom, the Office of International Religious Freedom, and the Ambassador at Large; the U.S. Government Roundtable on Religious Freedom; the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues; and annual reviews such as the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and on Religious Freedom.

The involvement of the non-governmental community in each of these processes is a cornerstone of their authority and their success, and NCSJ has participated within and alongside the official U.S. delegations to numerous international fora during the past 30 years, most recently in Vienna at the June 2003 OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and just last week in Warsaw at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. (I would ask to include NCSJ's Warsaw statement in the record of this hearing.)

Beyond bolstering frameworks like the OSCE, there is much that we as a nation must do to fill them with substance and content. Some programs and laws that have succeeded at home may be applicable to situations in Western and Eastern Europe. These include the well-known initiatives by the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, and other members of the NCSJ umbrella. At the same time, we can identify programs that have worked in Europe and consider how to adapt them to an American context.

We must work with the local communities in the successor states and elsewhere, to tailor our approach as much as to empower emerging leaders on the ground. Close contact and cooperation with local activists reinforces their role in society and enhances the legitimacy of citizen-based advocacy.

Without a doubt, the United States must commit more human and financial resources to initiating, aiding and propagating effective tolerance and enforcement mechanisms overseas. With the spread of freedom and return of national sovereignty to Eastern and Central Europe, we are seeing a long-awaited readiness to take real steps in combating anti-Semitism and the myriad

other forms of xenophobia it has engendered and legitimized. We are also seeing a grudging and growing recognition in the West of its own problems and obligations.

The responsibility of the United States, as a nation steeped in its own history of intolerance, must be to motivate. But we must also be willing to bear some of the cost of realizing this investment in humanity. Whether through direct funding, non-governmental grants or government-to-government partnerships, the United States must follow through. Representing an umbrella of national organizations and local communities, NCSJ urges the Senate to support full or increased funding for the overseas programs that are fulfilling the unprecedented potential for tolerance and pluralism in Europe. If some of these nations continue to lag in their democratic progress, the response should be to increase rather than reduce assistance to non-governmental and citizen groups. Rather than reducing American-funded broadcasts to Central and Eastern Europe, these should be broadened and infused with even greater attention to pluralism and minority issues.

Mr. Chairman, NCSJ and a host of organizations – here and abroad – know of the Senate’s commitment and effectiveness on this issue. Thank you again for this opportunity, and for the continued leadership that you and your colleagues have shown.

**ATTACHMENT****NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia****Statement to the 2003 OSCE Implementation Meeting, Working Session 12:  
“Prevention of Discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia and Anti-Semitism”****Warsaw, October 14, 2003****Delivered by Shai Franklin, Director of Governmental Relations**

Distinguished Moderator and Delegates,

I would first commend to your attention the concise recommendations assembled by a coalition of non-governmental organizations, including NCSJ, and to express appreciation for the dedicated work of the American delegation, headed by Ambassadors Pamela Hyde Smith and Stephan Minikes.

As the representative of an organization relating to issues in the Baltics and the Soviet successor states, which has worked within the Helsinki process since its inception, I also wish to highlight the constructive leadership of parliamentarians including our own Members of Congress who are attending today, who have worked with Dr. Gert Weisskirchen to forge a multilateral coalition of legislators from across the OSCE region. Dr. Weisskirchen's colleague, German Delegate Claudia Roth, first proposed a 2004 Berlin conference on anti-Semitism this past June and is here again with the same passionate call; I urge any delegations that have yet to endorse the 2004 conference to do so today.

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

Last June, at the first-ever OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism, governments began to share information, ideas and commitments for combating anti-Semitism at home and throughout the OSCE region, under the chairmanship of the Netherlands. They did so within a new framework that implicitly recognizes anti-Semitism as a distinct human rights concern and a real threat to regional stability.

Of the series of worthy recommendations, with which you are all probably familiar, I wish to highlight just a few: Training of law enforcement, education of youth and the public, and meetings of experts on these and other topics – opportunities that occur outside this and other chambers, in between the periodic assemblies. These are just a few of the many examples.

Notably, in advocating for a separate OSCE focus on anti-Semitism, nations once under Communist control are among the leaders: Latvia, Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, and others. These so-called “new” societies do take seriously both the threat of anti-Semitism and

the necessity of coordinating a transnational strategy through the OSCE. This was evident a few minutes ago during the side event focusing on post-Soviet responses.

By enunciating the OSCE's substantive commitment, Europe and North America are breaking with a collective past that began with anti-Semitism, propagated an abundance of hatreds and phobias, and retains the disguise of latent neglect and a cloak of "cultural context".

To become the truly free society that the Helsinki process promised we should be, all participating States must assume responsibility for the safety and acceptance of all faiths and ethnicities. Sixty years since the Holocaust, Europeans and North Americans are finally breaking unequivocally with the past – not by commemorating it, by repudiating it, or by forgetting it, but by applying its lessons to ongoing manifestations of anti-Semitism.

Concretizing this break with "business as usual" means providing an effective mandate through this winter's Ministerial Council, setting a high profile for next year's Berlin conference on anti-Semitism, assigning a specific responsibility within ODIHR, and ongoing consultation and oversight among participating States.

Without directly and distinctly addressing contemporary anti-Semitism, we cannot say we are better than our predecessors, nor can we ensure lasting protection from newer forms of prejudice and hatred. Nations that were not free 15 years ago already appreciate this imperative, and they have reiterated it here.

The specific recommendations for governments and society are well documented in the report from Vienna. The recommendations for the next steps in the OSCE process are summarized in the NGO statement which I referenced. What the delegates here today can contribute to this process, beyond your own recommendations and initiatives, is to prepare the ground for Berlin, to work with your governments on clear and strong language in the 2003 Ministerial Declaration, and to create an oversight and coordination function within ODIHR.

Thank you very much.