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Resisting Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia in Europe
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As AJC's Director of International Jewish Affairs and previously as its European Director, I have worked closely with European Jewish communities for nearly three decades and have a firsthand appreciation for their struggles and their success in rebuilding Jewish life after the Holocaust and (in Central and Eastern Europe) after the fall of Communism.

In the early 2000s, when we witnessed a resurgence of antisemitism in Europe, I was part of efforts, initiated by Members of Congress and then taken up by the Administration to press the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to organize the first high level international conferences in Vienna and then in Berlin to address the problem. Since 2009, I have served as the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism, which has afforded me the opportunity to address officially and directly the governments of over 30 participating States on what they must do to combat anti-Semitism.

We can generalize and say with certainty that antisemitism remains a persistent and serious threat to the wellbeing of Jews and Jewish life and worship across Europe. But we must also recognize that it manifests itself in different ways in different countries, even as Jewish communities themselves differ in numbers, in visibility and in their national histories.

Mindful of the limited time I have, let me suggest three essential steps that we must take if we are to successfully combat the antisemitism we see today.

- **DEFINITION:** We must define the problem. Antisemitism comes in old and new forms. We need to know what it is and how it affects Jews and Jewish life.
- **RECOGNITION:** We must recognize that there are multiple and often quite different sources for antisemitic incitement, incidents and hate crimes today, and we need to identify them.
- **MOBILIZATION:** Armed with this information, we should be better able to mobilize governments and develop the necessary tools to combat antisemitism. This ranges from the immediate concerns of physical security to long-term efforts to educate and create a climate of acceptance.

DEFINITION

Fifteen years ago, I worked closely with a group of academic experts and the leadership of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in the development of what came to be called the Working Definition of Antisemitism. We sought to provide a succinct definition with clear and pragmatic examples of what antisemitism looks like today. As most people understand, this can be plain hatred, prejudice and discrimination directed at Jews. It can also show itself in conspiracy theories that paint Jews as controlling the media or world economy, a form of antisemitism that can exist even in places where there are no Jews. It is the basic motivation of Holocaust deniers who use this denial or distortion of history as a weapon first directed against those very survivors who were eyewitness to the crimes. And notably, and most recently, it can present itself in ways relating to the State of Israel. When Israel is

demonized, when its actions are equated to the crimes of the Nazis, when its very right to exist is questioned we are no longer talking about criticism, but instead a new form of antisemitism. And as Jews and Jewish communities are often conflated with Israel, they have in turn become targets and victims of physical attacks.

It is reassuring then, that a growing number of European countries are now adopting and implementing this Working Definition. It helps police understand that antisemitic hate crimes can take many forms. As police and other government authorities monitor and collect data on antisemitic hate crimes (and even disaggregating data to separate antisemitic hate crimes from others is a recent development), it will help them define individual categories to record those incidents. It's also an effective educational tool for prosecutors and judges. We have examples of anti-Israel demonstrators in France who have turned violent and attacked Jews, but authorities considered this a political incident rather than a hate crime. An arson attack on a synagogue in Germany was deemed by the judge not to be an antisemitic hate crime because the perpetrator had voiced anti-Israel opinions on his social media accounts. Knowledge and use of the definition should prevent such occurrences in the future.

RECOGNITION

The sources of antisemitic incidents are multiple. Data from the surveys conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights point to (1) rightwing, populist and neo-Nazi groups, (2) those with an extreme political left agenda, and (3) those from Muslim communities who hold strong Islamist views.

On the Right

There has been an increase in threats and violent incidents coming from rightwing extremists in several countries. This includes a notable increase in Germany and particularly in its Eastern States, which parallels the increasing political support for the rightwing party, Alternative for Germany (AfD). The armed attack on the synagogue in Halle last fall—which might have been much worse had congregants not been able to lock the doors—is the most notable example. White nationalist groups in Scandinavia, which have long been a matter of concern, are becoming more popular, drawing on public fears over increased migration from the Middle East and North Africa. These groups have always and continue to espouse antisemitic messages as part of their agenda. Graffiti attacks last November on synagogues, cemeteries and private homes in several Scandinavian countries did no physical harm. But the fact that they had the exact same pattern and took place simultaneously on the anniversary of *Kristallnacht* made very clear that this was a planned and organized assault, and it sent a very chilling message to the Jewish community. Next time the attacks could prove violent.

On the Left

Antisemitism on the left may not pose the same physical threats, but it undermines and even challenges the place of individual Jews in their own societies. The most notable example of this is what we have witnessed in recent years in the United Kingdom, with the takeover of the British Labour Party by Jeremy Corbyn and his associates. A party and this party leader, who claimed to fight racism in society, willfully condoned antisemitism in its midst. Mr. Corbyn's extreme anti-Israel views led him to embrace recognized terrorist movements while casually casting antisemitic aspersions at Jewish critics. A majority of British Jews had long viewed the Labour Party as their natural political home, but now an even larger majority of those Jews concluded that its leader was an anti-Semite. This has been the most extreme and unvarnished

example of antisemitism on the left, but it is far from the only one. We can find similar voices in the mainstream center-left parties elsewhere in Europe as well.

Within the Muslim Community

When we witnessed a resurgence of antisemitism in Western Europe in the early 2000s, it quickly became evident to those Jews who were victims of these attacks that most of them came from parts of the Arab and Muslim communities. But it took governments much longer to come to the same conclusion. As I noted earlier, not many countries recorded hate crime data and fewer still took note of specific antisemitic incidents, let alone attempt to identify the perpetrators. In some cases, the Middle East background of the attacker would lead authorities to characterize the incident as political rather than antisemitic, even if it was a synagogue or a Jewish school bus that was attacked. In France, with Europe's largest Jewish community and the country with the greatest number of antisemitic incidents, its policy of *laïcité* or secularity meant that authorities were prohibited from formally identifying either victims or perpetrators by religion. Other countries, which may have had the ability to examine their own hate crime data more deeply, avoided doing so. One could only conclude that they feared revealing the extent of Muslim antisemitism would bolster support for rightwing, anti-immigrant parties. But these inconvenient facts can no longer be ignored.

It is not only the ample anecdotal evidence of identifiable Jews (wearing kippot or other signs of their Jewishness) being harassed and attacked on the streets of major European cities, but the objective data from new surveys. In fact, in a survey released only last week by AJC Paris and IFOP, French Jews identified "Islamist antisemitism" as the primary source of attacks. And to put this in its proper perspective, consider that even though French Jews constitute only 1 percent of the total population, they are the victims of 50 percent of all racist attacks.

While I have briefly summarized what European Jews have identified as the three primary sources for antisemitic invective and attacks, there are other concerns that also impact segments of European Jewry. They must also be identified when describing antisemitism today.

Holocaust Distortion

The very week of this hearing marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The date of that liberation, January 27, has come to be known as international Holocaust Remembrance Day. We are mindful that as time passes and as the number of living survivors who were firsthand witnesses are passing away, knowledge of the Holocaust and even familiarity with a few basic facts are diminishing. This was confirmed in the latest Pew Research survey, *What Americans Know about the Holocaust*.

But in the countries where the Holocaust took place there is the added burden of recognizing the role and responsibility of local authorities and collaborators in the murder of their Jewish citizens. This did not come easy or soon even for Western Europe, where democratic governments were reestablished immediately after the war's end. When the small number of Dutch Jews who survived the Holocaust returned to their homes in Amsterdam, they were presented with unpaid tax bills covering their time in concentration camps; only a few years ago did Dutch leaders apologize for this. Even though French police and bureaucrats carried out the work that rounded up and deported over 70,000 Jews in France to their deaths, the French government only formally acknowledged responsibility for its role in 1995. Similarly, only in 1995 did the Austrian Government establish a fund for Nazi victims and accept its role as a ready accomplice.

Mindful of this, we must recognize the special challenges facing the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which had no opportunity to confront their own Holocaust-era past until 1991. But these were countries where some of the worst atrocities took place and where collaboration frequently involved the actual murder of Jewish neighbors. And the small remnant Jewish communities—undergoing their own remarkable rebirth after the Holocaust and decades of Communist oppression—are significantly composed of survivors and their descendants. One can readily understand their horror when new post-Communist governments and political parties sought to rehabilitate former war criminals and to honor the very fascist-era leaders who were complicit in the Holocaust.

Thus, in the late 1990s and 2000s, there were concerted efforts to push back on this troubling phenomenon. International historical commissions aided by the considerable research carried out at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem brought forward correct and critical accounts of this period. At the same time, these Jewish communities sought to reclaim former Jewish properties—synagogues, schools and other communal buildings that had first been seized by the Nazis and then nationalized under Communism. They were necessary resources to rebuild local Jewish life and to assist the remaining, needy survivors in their midst. But it quickly became evident that pushing for restitution and demanding a critical self-examination of this complicated historical era also brought with it a wave of antisemitism. Perhaps this was inevitable, since a half century of Communism did not eradicate the antisemitism that was commonplace in prewar times, but rather merely kept it frozen. As one Jewish communal leader put it, “We can have antisemitism with restitution or antisemitism without restitution, but we will have antisemitism.”

Nevertheless, there was considerable progress in these areas—negotiations and agreements on communal property return or compensation and the publication of new, critical histories and documents detailing local involvement in the Holocaust. Statues and street signs that had quickly been erected to honor those fascist-era leaders were being removed. Proving one’s readiness for NATO membership and demonstrating this to Washington and to Members of Congress clearly pushed things along.

Thus, it is particularly distressing that today we are seeing a return of this Holocaust distortion and often by people and in places that should know better. Legislation adopted in Poland to defend the nation’s honor is widely recognized as impeding critical analysis of the Holocaust period. Last summer when the mayor of Vilnius removed a plaque that honored one wartime leader whose involvement in the Holocaust was well-documented, he faced angry demonstrators, intent on restoring the honor, while most national politicians were largely silent. In Sofia and Budapest, skinheads and neo-Nazis organize marches to commemorate fascist-era leaders and events, although this is not supported by the government. However, the bottom line is this: For Jewish communities that are composed primarily of survivors and their descendants this is much more than a debate over history. It undermines their own present-day sense of comfort and security. It is felt in its own way as significantly as are the physical attacks taking place in Western Europe.

Restricting Jewish Religious Practice

Finally, we must take note of efforts in some European countries to restrict or ban outright the practices of religious slaughter (kashrut) and ritual circumcision (brit milah), which have been essential elements of Jewish life for centuries. The main proponents of these efforts are not antisemitic; more likely they are animal rights activists or child right advocates. But what may not be antisemitic by intent can still be antisemitic in effect. Although the practice of infant circumcision is common in America, that is not the

case in Europe. Opponents claim this is a barbaric act that physically mars and psychologically damages the child. They propose that the decision “merely be deferred” until adulthood, when the individual can make his own decision. But for Jews—and for Muslims—circumcising one’s infant son is an obligation rooted in Biblical commandments. While there has been legislation in some countries to restrict the ways in which circumcision is carried out or to mandate the presence of medical professionals, it has nowhere yet been banned altogether. But efforts to do so continue to be mounted. And should they one day succeed they could very well mark the end of Jewish communal life in those countries.

There has been more success in the passage of legislation that forbids the practice of kosher slaughter, most recently in Belgium, where the Jewish community is now challenging this in court. Several countries already have bans in place. The oldest is Switzerland, where legislators decided over a century ago that it would discourage Jewish immigration to the country. Denmark banned the practice more recently, and as the community there imports the kosher meat it needs, it decided not to challenge the decision. However, should more countries adopt a ban, it will make it harder for all these communities to find kosher meat, and it will certainly increase the costs of doing so.

One might assume—especially viewing it from an American perspective—that these measures obviously clash with the elemental principle of religious freedom and should be soundly rebuffed. But in some Western and Northern European countries, where societies are quite secular, this may not count for very much. As one Dutch Jewish leader told me when they were fighting Parliamentary legislation to ban kosher slaughter, “I am confining my argument to saying that there is no scientific evidence to show that our method of slaughtering animals is any less humane than what the law would require. I think more Dutch citizens believe in animal rights than in religious freedom.”

MOBILIZATION

There has been considerable success in getting European governments and intergovernmental organizations to recognize the problem of antisemitism today. To a degree this is a result of widespread advocacy and educational efforts, which have had considerable support from, among others, the United States Congress in its network of relations and direct meetings with foreign leaders and parliaments. But it has also been a function of the growing severity and lethality of the problem, which makes it impossible to ignore.

So, what are the steps governments are taking and what more can they do?

Adopt the Working Definition

It is notable that an ever-growing number of European governments are adopting the (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism. Only last week, Sweden and Italy did so, bringing the total number to nineteen. In December 2018, the European Council passed a declaration on combating antisemitism which recommended that Member States adopt the definition and in March the EU’s Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism will bring together EU representatives in Brussels to discuss adoption and implementation by every Member State. Even the very debate and discussion about taking such a decision are valuable as they serve to educate the general public to the multidimensional nature of antisemitism. With the adoption of the definition we can anticipate that it will become a part of police training manuals and serve as guidance to public prosecutors and judges. A few countries are doing this, but many others need to be encouraged to follow suit.

Provide Security

Sadly, physical threats to Jewish life and worship are very real. Most governments recognize this and are acting accordingly. In some places, such as France, Belgium and Denmark, this has meant deploying more police and even calling on the military to protect Jewish schools and synagogues. More money is being made available to improve the physical security of these buildings. Police authorities are working more closely with Jewish community security professionals so that there is now genuine crisis management coordination. But more can be done. Most Jewish communities still rely primarily on their own volunteers. There is a gap between money that is needed and the money that is made available. And the protection of these Jewish sites does not address the vulnerability that Jews feel on their way to and from them or in other day-to-day activities.

Appoint a National Coordinator

One significant development—and a sign that governments are taking the problem seriously—is the appointment of national coordinators to oversee the fight against antisemitism. This is the case now in Germany and Bulgaria and most recently Italy. They can be advocates for the needs of the community; they can coordinate responses to antisemitic incidents bringing together local and national officials; they can push for education and training and serve a voice to raise public awareness.

Educate

Education matters. A Pew Research survey of attitudes in European countries found that positive views of Jews coordinated with those who knew Jews. But with such relatively small numbers, there is need for new and creative efforts to help people learn about Jews and Judaism. These include Jewish museums which can offer a picture of the role that Jews play in the life of their respective countries. It includes outreach programs that send Jewish high school and college students on the road to visit schools and to meet directly with young people of their same age. One good example of this is the Jewish Community of Copenhagen which welcomes visiting school groups and encourages others to “Book a Jew,” which will send a community representative to them.

It means ensuring that textbooks and school curricula properly reflect the long history of Jews and their contribution to national life. In this regard Hungary is worth noting, as a lengthy but productive negotiation between Education Ministry officials and a consortium of Jewish organizations resulted in several hundred facts of Jewish history being included in the national curricula and the textbooks printed to serve it.

Understanding that there are more negative views of Jews among Muslims is not a matter of finding blame but should be an impetus to develop targeted educational programs that will change those attitudes. The German government and the city of Berlin are supporting civil society initiatives undertaken by Muslim NGOs that are geared to the new Muslim migrants in that city. Rabbis and Imams—and Jews and Muslims more generally—are joining to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding. Only last week our AJC CEO David Harris and a Jewish delegation together with the Muslim World League (MWL) Secretary General and a delegation of 62 Muslims from 28 countries visited Auschwitz. The group then traveled to Warsaw where they toured POLIN: Museum of the History of Polish Jews and participated in interfaith worship.

Understand the Lessons of the Holocaust

At the OSCE Berlin Conference on Combating Anti-Semitism in 2004, participating States agreed that Holocaust education is an effective tool in fighting antisemitism and committed to programs of education and remembrance. Since then, an ever-increasing number of countries observe Holocaust Remembrance Day and include the subject in school curricula. But these programs and their effectiveness vary greatly. In some places the universal lessons of the Holocaust are so focused on human cruelty and multiple genocides that the words “antisemitism” and “Jews” and those lessons are entirely absent. Particularly in Europe there are national and local stories—of persecution and collaboration as well as rescue—that should be part of the curriculum, as the Holocaust not only happened elsewhere. More governments are recognizing that with growing numbers of students who come from migrant backgrounds new methods must be found to engage them in what might otherwise be dismissed as someone else’s national history.

Address Cyberhate

We have also come to recognize that white supremacists and ultranationalists are using the tools of social media to connect with each other across vast distances and thereby reinforce their agenda of hate and lethal attacks. In this way the violent attacks that we have witnessed in Queensland, in Pittsburgh and in Halle really are part of a “conspiracy” of murderers who share a common racist and antisemitic ideology. Teaching an appreciation for pluralism and diversity must be a part of all our schools; it can never and nowhere be taken for granted. But we will also need to rely on pressure and government engagement if we are to successfully rein in cyberhate.

I hope I have offered you a clear and comprehensive picture of the problem of antisemitism in Europe today along with measures to combat it. I am ready to elaborate on my testimony as well as answer any questions you may have.