

**Testimony for House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy, and the Environment  
“Resisting Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia in Europe”**

January 29, 2020

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Thank you, Chairman Keating and Ranking Member Kinzinger for convening this important discussion. As this subcommittee knows, the scourge of antisemitism did not disappear with the end of the Holocaust and the Second World War. However, at no point since 1945 have these matters seemed more acute. With the passing of the generation of Holocaust survivors, it is at once more difficult and more necessary to counter these challenges, and there will be no path forward without American leadership.

It is my honor to speak on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, our nation’s *living* memorial to the Holocaust. At the Museum, we inspire citizens and leaders in the United States and abroad to confront hatred, prevent genocide, and promote human dignity through active and regular engagement with the Holocaust. We focus on the Holocaust because it was an unprecedented catastrophe. It took place across Europe, it involved persons from multiple societies, professions, and cultures, and it happened on a scale that shattered our civilization so greatly that we had to develop new international systems to cope with the devastation. The effects of the Holocaust resonate for many reasons, not the least of which is its ability to warn us that the unthinkable is always possible, that we must rise above our potential to abuse privilege, and that we cannot remain on the sidelines when we encounter hatred.

To borrow from H.G. Wells, we seem to be in a “race between education and catastrophe” in the fight against antisemitism and other forms of hate.<sup>1</sup> Often, we think of education in ways that we imagine will serve our economies or the physical sciences. There is certainly a logic to this, but does this model of education generate a moral citizenry or secure human dignity? Are we educating one another in ways that sustain learning over a lifetime?

There are many approaches to consider, including supporting education on ethics, civics, and democratic values. Certainly, we need to continue enhancing how we educate about the Holocaust and we must begin to educate against antisemitism. Despite the growth of Holocaust awareness, teaching and learning about the Holocaust needs reinforcement. A recent study by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany found that a majority of French citizens

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<sup>1</sup> H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind*, vol. II (New York, Macmillan, 1920), 594.

(57%) did not know that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust. The percentage was even greater (69%) among those aged 18-38. More troubling, perhaps, 45% of French millennials did not know that the French government collaborated with the Nazi regime.<sup>2</sup> A 2019 study of adults in Austria yielded similarly disheartening data.<sup>3</sup>

One explanation for these results may be how we learn. Many of us only learn about the Holocaust in secondary school, and only then somewhat inconsistently. To be certain, it is critical to introduce this subject at the secondary school level because it is in the classroom that many students first encounter the Holocaust and can begin to understand the devastation that follows unbridled hate, the decline of democracies, and the horrors of conflict. Secondary school education is an investment in the future. It needs support from other forums to influence behavior, and such change takes many years. Unfortunately, we are witnessing social, political, and cultural challenges in Europe that demand more immediate solutions that can support and build from more traditional education initiatives.

Perhaps there are lessons from the German experience? Within a few generations after the Second World War, Germany became one of the more peaceable, democratic, and tolerant countries in Europe, where the subject of the Holocaust continues to resonate on a regular basis. The German people and their governments deserve considerable credit, particularly since reunification. This state of affairs also emerged because of a U.S.-led international effort to work with and educate Germans on democracy building. Americans and German cooperation did not then and does not now only focus on secondary schools. We also train those leaders responsible for building and affirming democratic values, namely, journalists, lawyers, the judiciary, politicians, public intellectuals, the police, and the military.

Training people to identify and respond to antisemitism must include opportunities to learn about the Holocaust, as well as the range of Jewish experiences and the ways by which Jews have contributed to politics, culture, and society across the globe and on the local level. Sadly, it is all too common to hear European educators, political leaders, and the public refer to events like the Holocaust as “Jewish history,” as if it were somehow something other than part of a shared past. If we do not reconnect our common experiences, discord and discrimination will fill the void.

It is imperative to acknowledge that antisemitism is not just a problem unique to one particular community or region. In Europe today, there is too great a tendency to dismiss antisemitism and some related biases as an import from abroad or a problem of countries only in one region of Europe. The claim of antisemitism as a foreign import is often directed at migrant communities, particularly Muslim communities in Western Europe. To be certain, there have been significant and frightening examples of violence against European Jewish communities by Muslim extremists. There have also been many verbal and physical attacks against Europe’s Jewish communities by non-Muslims, as seen most tragically of late in the October 9, 2019 attack on the

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<sup>2</sup> Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, “Stunning Survey of French Adults Reveal Critical Gaps in Holocaust Knowledge,” January 24, 2020, as at <http://www.claimscon.org/france-study/>, last accessed January 25, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, “New Survey by the Claims Conference Finds Critical Gaps in Holocaust Knowledge in Austria,” 2019, as at <http://www.claimscon.org/austria-study/>, last accessed January 25, 2020.

synagogue in Halle, Germany. No community, religious group, ethnicity, or nation is immune from antisemitic animus.

The second type of claim, that is, the claim that antisemitism happens elsewhere, often rests on imprecise hate crime statistics or statements by political leaders that their home countries are free of antisemitism. Hate crime statistics are notoriously difficult to compile with accuracy, and even more difficult to compare across borders due to different reporting standards, cultural differences, and a tendency by states to not report data. More to the point, as indicated by recent research by the European Union's Agency on Fundamental Rights, 79% of European Jews have indicated that they do not report antisemitic incidents to police, with close to half of these respondents saying that they feel "nothing would have changed had they done so."<sup>4</sup>

Although some forms of antisemitism are perhaps more common in certain countries and there are clearly different rates at which anti-Jewish hatred rears its head, antisemitism in all of its forms has been and remains a Europe-wide challenge that requires a trans-Atlantic and multilateral effort to combat. In more ways than not, antisemitism was born in Europe. Anti-Jewish prejudice waxed and waned over Europe's centuries, reaching heights at several points, including but not limited to the Inquisition, the pogroms of the late Russian Empire, and during the Holocaust, but antisemitism has been and remains a constant of the European experience.

One form of antisemitism that is particularly pernicious and growing is distortion and denial of the Holocaust. As the well-known survivor of Auschwitz, Primo Levi, wrote many years ago, "The best way to defend oneself against the invasion of burdensome memories is to impede their entry."<sup>5</sup> This statement rings sadly true today.

The origins of Holocaust denial and distortion began with the Nazis. It appeared through coded euphemisms to describe the murder of Jews, such as "special treatment" (*Sonderbehandlung*), as well as through formal efforts, such as Special Action (*Sonderaktion*) 1005, which was a Nazi program that used slave laborers to exhume mass graves and destroy the corpses of murdered Jews in order to cover up what had happened. Distortion and denial continued in the postwar era. In the West (including in the United States), it became most notorious in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s when hate groups and their affiliates engaged in campaigns to deny the factuality of the Holocaust. In the communist-controlled East, distortion and denial took the form of omission, namely, the specificity of the genocide of the Jewish people was lost in favor of state-mandated claims that there were multiple "victims of fascism."

The dynamics of distortion and denial changed after former communist countries began to grapple with their histories in the 1990s. Sometimes these debates led to positive developments, including Holocaust education efforts in key Eastern European countries. Sometimes negative outcomes emerged, such as myths of "Judeo-Communism" that seemed to excuse crimes against Jews. Despite our hopes, denial and distortion continued to gain acceptance. By 2003, the

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<sup>4</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, "Antisemitism: Overview of Data Available in the European Union, 2008-2018," 9, as at [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2019-antisemitism-overview-2008-2018\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-antisemitism-overview-2008-2018_en.pdf), last accessed January 24, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986, 1988), 20.

European Court of Human Rights recognized that Holocaust denial and distortion “subverts the fight against racism and anti-Semitism ... [and is] a serious threat to public order.”<sup>6</sup>

Today, Holocaust denial, that is, claims that the genocide of the Jews never occurred, is relatively rare in Europe but distortion of the Holocaust is common enough to seem almost omnipresent. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, a 34-country international body where I serve on the U.S. delegation and chair the committee on antisemitism and Holocaust denial, has identified several forms of Holocaust distortion.<sup>7</sup> They include

- Intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust;
- Minimizing considerably the number of victims of the Holocaust;
- Blaming the Jews for the Holocaust;
- Using the term “Holocaust” to describe related atrocities or by engaging in false comparisons with other mass crimes;
- Casting the Holocaust as a positive historical event; and
- Blurring responsibility for the murders of the Holocaust era.

Holocaust distortion buttresses other and more dangerous forms of antisemitism. The groups and individuals who employ Holocaust distortion often engage with others who doubt the realities of the Holocaust, as well with those who pursue narrow and identity-based ideologies. Holocaust distortion is a component in the growing international dialogue of extremism, one that is helping destabilize the social-political dynamics of NATO-allied states and in those other European countries that seek to build and sustain healthy democracies.

Holocaust distortion can also skirt European legal norms. Many European countries have laws and regulations that criminalize denial of the Holocaust. The first of these appeared in the immediate postwar era in Austria and then in West Germany, and were part of larger denazification efforts. As Holocaust denial became more common, European policymakers developed more focused regulations, beginning with France’s Gayssot Law of 1990. In 2008, the European Union passed a Council Framework Decision “on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law,” which gave additional impetus to the adoption of Holocaust denial laws.<sup>8</sup> Although not every EU country implemented this decision, 21 EU member countries have passed laws that address Holocaust denial. Outside the EU, a further five European countries have similar regulations and a few others attack this issue through hate speech provisions.

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<sup>6</sup> ECtHR, *Garaudy v. France*, Appl. No. 65831/01, June 24, 2003, as at <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-788339-805233>, last accessed January 23, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), “Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial Paper on Holocaust Distortion and Denial,” May 13, 2019, as at [https://holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/Paper%20on%20Distortion\\_0.pdf](https://holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/Paper%20on%20Distortion_0.pdf), and IHRA, “Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion,” October 23, 2013 as at <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-holocaust-denial-and-distortion>. Both accessed last on January 24, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA, November 28, 2008, Official Journal of the European Union, L 328/55, as at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32008F0913&from=EN>, last accessed January 24, 2020.

Paradoxically, some of these laws might open the door to distorting history. Whereas the original laws against Holocaust distortion sought to protect historical facts, newer variants seem to seek the protection of historical narratives. The Russian government, for example, has applied its 2014 law in ways that might curtail full engagement with history.<sup>9</sup> Since the passage of the Russian law, a number of other European countries both within and outside the EU have passed or amended Holocaust denial laws in ways that bring with them the potential for abuse because they seem to affirm particularistic and nationalistic narratives.

Given these complications and inconsistent applications of existing laws, it remains unknown if these laws help or take away from attempts to address denial and distortion of the Holocaust. Besides, is legislation always the best solution? When has censorship curbed the development of worldviews, both good and ill? Moreover, these laws often do not address the tendency to politicize and misuse the Holocaust – a trend seen in many vigorous discussions about how European museums present the Holocaust.

For more than a decade, there have been political and civil society debates about museums and their narratives on countries as diverse as Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Ukraine, and several others. This unfortunate development often relates to a similar challenge, namely, a tendency by some European cultures to focus on the histories of rescuers at the sake of similar interrogation of the actions of those who collaborated with the Nazis, those who profited from the Holocaust, or those stood idle as their Jewish neighbors disappeared. An almost singular focus on one group fails to educate or inform appropriately the range of experiences that led to the Holocaust, thereby distorting our view of the past and limiting our ability to imagine ways that we might respond in the face of evil.

Decades of investment in initiatives that include education at the secondary level, the opening of archives, and the support of cultural dialogue have brought remarkable growth in awareness of the Holocaust and related atrocities of the Second World War. The problems that led to the Holocaust persist, continue to metastasize, and threaten our regional, national, and international security. We must build from the foundations of our earlier successes in new ways that can achieve long-term opportunities and peace for future generations.

First, we must expand and strengthen the infrastructure of European organizations that can work with international partners to provide authoritative information on the Holocaust and help counter antisemitism and other forms of extremist thought. Relatively few large memorials and museums benefit from significant and ongoing support of European governments. Consider, for example, developments in the United States since the Congress established the United States

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<sup>9</sup> This became clear in 2016 when a Russian blogger received a fine of 200,000 rubles for reposting an article that discussed the Nazi German and Soviet occupations of Poland in 1939. This decision was possible because the Russian law bases itself on the *judgments* of the International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg, whereas earlier European laws based themselves in Article 6 of the *Charter* of the IMT and Articles 6, 7, and 8 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court. For the case of the Russian law, see Nikolay Kopolov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 296. For European laws, see Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA, November 28, 2008, Official Journal of the European Union, L 328/55, Art. 1(1) c, d., as at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32008F0913&from=EN>, last accessed January 23, 2020.

Holocaust Memorial Council in 1980.<sup>10</sup> This act led to the establishment of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Since the Museum opened its doors in April 1993, more than 45 million people have visited us here in Washington and each year close to 20 million people from 238 countries and territories access our online resources. Imagine the impact if there were similar institutions in the lands where the Holocaust occurred.

Second, national governments and international organizations should ensure that funds do not go to organizations that promote antisemitism, distortion of the Holocaust, or other forms of hate and bias. In 2016, for example, a foundation linked to the far-right Alliance for Peace and Freedom Party received €600,000, of which close to €200,000 helped go to sponsoring a neo-Nazi meeting in Stockholm, Sweden, at which antisemitic songs were sung.<sup>11</sup> And in 2018, the German government was finally able to cut state funding of its longest-lasting neo-Nazi party, the National Democratic Party.<sup>12</sup> While the EU and a few sovereign European governments have wrestled with this issue for many years, gaps remain. It is self-evident: One cannot simultaneously resist Holocaust distortion and antisemitism, while at the same time enabling those who promote it.

Third, and perhaps most critically, European governments and international organizations should develop programs for public servants that can communicate the relevance of understanding the Holocaust and combating antisemitism for their work. These programs should target civil servants, law enforcement personnel, military leaders, legislators, parliamentarians, and other government professionals. They might highlight the failures of the predecessors to stand up against encroaching fascism and Nazism; instruct on the warning signs of threats to core values; or teach about the risks associated with resurgent antisemitism, racism, and the distortion of historical crimes.

The Holocaust occurred across Europe, just as today's manifestations of antisemitism and hate transgress borders. Therefore, it is necessary for the EU and other multilateral organizations to develop similar programs. In the case of civil servants in the EU, training might call for the mobilization of existing training and education facilities, such as the European Judicial Training Network or the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training, or the creation of new bodies. For the military, a Transatlantic Holocaust Training Initiative would enhance the ability of officers to recognize and confront mass crimes and human rights violations. NATO and related defense structures should provide analogous training to military officers in national and in multinational training facilities, such as the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, where military leaders from NATO, Europe, and beyond undergo excellent training in subjects that

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<sup>10</sup> "An Act to Establish the United States Holocaust Memorial Council," Public Law 96-388, U.S. Statutes at Large 94 (October 7, 1980), as at <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/96/388.pdf>, last accessed January 26, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Harry Cooper, "Far Right Feels Squeeze on EU Funding," *Politico*, February 14, 2017, as at <https://www.politico.eu/article/far-right-politicians-to-meps-we-want-eu-money-even-though-we-hate-the-eu-alliance-for-peace-and-freedom-apf/> or Daniel Mützel, "European Parliament Funding of Neo-Nazi Conference Rings Alarm Bells," *Euractiv*, April 27, 2016, as at <https://www.euractiv.com/section/euro-finance/news/european-parliament-funding-of-neo-nazi-conference-rings-alarm-bells/>. Both accessed last on January 24, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Josh Gabbatiss, "Germany Votes to Cut State Funding to Neo-Nazi Political Party," *The Independent*, February 2, 2018, as at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-ndp-funding-neo-nazi-political-national-democratic-party-afd-a8191611.html>, last accessed January 24, 2020.

represent the most pressing international threats, such as arms control and the resolution of inter-ethnic conflict.

A few days ago, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier reminded the international community of the duty to remember the Holocaust and to resist antisemitism and hatred in all of its forms.<sup>13</sup> This is not a responsibility of just one or two countries. It is a shared burden. Almost no country comes away clean from the legacy of the Holocaust. This is even true of the United States, where a variety of responses to the rise of Nazism remains an active topic of discussion and influences how we respond to genocide and mass crimes. This is why the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum developed an exhibition and educational resources on the actions and inactions that we Americans we assumed during the period of the Holocaust.

The suggestions I outline above can help us continue building a future on the foundations we created with our European allies in the last century, and it will help ensure that the Holocaust will continue to resonate for future generations. But if we do not act now, if we do not come to understand how to educate in order to better inform, and if we do not better equip ourselves to resist antisemitism and bias, we will have failed our communities, our allies, and each other.

Thank you very much for your leadership and your commitment to these critical issues.

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<sup>13</sup> Bundespräsident Frank-Walter Steinmeier, “World Holocaust Forum at Yad Vashem,” January 23, 2020, as at <http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2020/01/200123-World-Holocaust-Forum-Yad-Vashem.html>, last accessed January 24, 2020.