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House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Human Rights
"Anti-Semitism: A Growing Threat to All Faiths"
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First and foremost, I would like to say how proud I am to be here today. I am proud not only as the Chief Rabbi of Ukraine who has been living abroad for 23 years, through Soviet rule, downfall and the birth of an independent Ukraine. I am proud as an American, that my country recognizes that opportunities cause obligations. The opportunity for these distinguished members of the House to positively affect the lives of Jews and other minorities living in Europe, caused them to act and have this hearing today.

On the one hand, I think that many in Ukraine will be very happy about today's hearing! We finally made it! Ukraine is finally recognized as part of Europe! Something we have been pushing and bargaining for many years. However, it is an unfortunate circumstance that brings me here today. It is the question of anti Semitism in Ukraine.

Being that the situation with anti Semitism is very different from Western Europe, I would like to explain a few things about the history of anti Semitism in Ukraine. There were historically 2 camps competing with each other. There was the nationalist grass roots animosity between Ukrainians and Jews which is probably best portrayed in Sholom Aleichem's writings such as The Fiddler on the Roof. But more so was the Government sponsored anti Semitism. Begun by the Czars as official edicts and decrees against the Jews, it was perfected to a science by the Soviets. I am not mentioning when the government provoked the local pogroms. During Soviet times Jews were systematically discriminated against in every single sphere of society and social life.

As of 1992 and Ukraine's independence, government anti Semitism has thank G-d all but disappeared. There are instances of anti Semitic acts carried out in Ukraine but I would like to now speak about form and substance of Anti Semitism. I believe that that is very important in understanding the unique forms of anti Semitism prevalent in a society that has not yet perfected, to put it mildly, the rule of law.

1) The first and foremost form is of course acts of violence and vandalism. When people or property are attacked because they are Jews, that is the expression and most painful form of anti Semitism. Thank G-d that is the least prevalent in Ukraine. Although we have had instances of attacks, thank G-d they have been few.

2) The second form of anti Semitism is publication of literature, speeches, political platforms which incite or may incite against Jews as individual or as a group. This is more prevalent in Ukraine, although not at epidemic proportions at all. I think that it is important to point out, that there was a time, not too long ago when this was a serious problem. There was a so called University in Ukraine printing and distributing tremendous amounts of anti Semitic literature with total impunity in Ukraine. This was stopped when the ones sponsoring this anti Semitism

withdrew their financial support. By the way, the sponsors were not Ukrainians and not even people or groups living or based in Ukraine.

3) The 3rd form of Anti-Semitism in Ukraine I would call psychological Anti-Semitism. It may be unique to Eastern Europe, to countries that have suffered in the not so distant past from the Holocaust, from Government Anti-Semitism. People who have suffered from a feeling of being unprotected by law enforcement will react and be frightened when seemingly harmless things happen. Such as a street being named in honor of Stepan Bandera. Most Jews and many others consider Bandera and his group of Ukrainian nationalists in Western Ukraine responsible for dozens of pogroms. It may or may not be true, but to someone who believes it, it will be frightening. When Former President Yushchenko, the so called Pro Western and Pro Democracy President of Ukraine decided to honor Bandera and Shukhevich with the highest Civilian Honor as Heroes of Ukraine, it brought out a terrible reaction by the Jewish Community. Nobody was hurt, attacked or even incited or spoken against! But for the psyche of a Ukrainian Jew that was anti-Semitic. And that brings me to the subject at hand.

Just as you will all agree that understating the true threat is wrong, so too, overstating it and blowing it out of proportion is damaging. I am not an apologist for Ukraine. Not for its government or for its people. I believe that the 7% of the Parliament seats in Ukraine occupied by members of the Svoboda party is definitely something that should concern us and should not be downplayed or ignored. However, we must study the source of the votes and evaluate the true power of the party, its members and know where it is heading. The Jews of Ukraine, an historically vulnerable community, does not feel vulnerable. Is it naivette? Or is it the fact that the Svoboda party has never put up a serious platform? The majority of their voters were protest voters, voting for the most outspoken opposition party. The Svoboda party has not been able to achieve anything in the local councils they control. It is the opinion of some analysts, that Svoboda is a populist party, its members not united by any ideology whatsoever, other than a seat in Parliament and the power that comes with it. Indeed, Mr. Tyagnabok, the head of the party has been trying to meet with members of the Jewish Community to explain to them that he is in no way Anti-Semitic. He has met with the US Ambassador, and more recently with the Israeli Ambassador. The impression is, that Mr. Tyagnabok does not control his members. That is not very comforting since the rhetoric is continuing. It may show, that the party has no discipline, which can stop them from introducing any serious legislation to the parliament. However, if the politics of right wing nationalism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, are allowed to fester and are totally ignored the danger of this 7% growing is possible. Nobody is passing laws or even trying to pass legislation against Jews in Ukraine. Nobody is calling for Jews to be deported or worse G-d forbid. However, we need not wait for something bad to happen. We therefore appreciate the statements made by Prime Minister Azarov, stating that the government of Ukraine will never negotiate agreements for coalition or legislation with Svoboda or any party that put forth Anti-Semitism as part of its platform.

I hope, that Ukraine continues its development into a true Western democratic society, where all citizens will continue to feel safe and protected. It is my hope that European leaders join in making that statement a reality. That Jews throughout Europe, and indeed the world, will live as full citizens of the countries of Europe. That the anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism and other negative feelings of discrimination and xenophobia are overpowered by feelings of respect and harmony.