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Anti-Semitism in the OSCE States – How Can the Vital Task of Overcoming this Prejudice Be Achieved?

Combating anti-Semitism is one of the publicly propagated aims of the OSCE, a 56-strong community of states that seeks to promote stability and security in Europe. In April 2004, high-ranking delegates gathered to attend a conference in Berlin and, after exchanging views for three days with representatives of non-governmental organizations, adopted a resolution combining a clear rejection of anti-Semitism with a catalogue of ideas on how the oldest religious, social, political, and cultural prejudice against a minority should be dealt with. The “Berlin Declaration”¹ is a political document that sets standards at the highest level. The work of day-to-day implementation in the participating countries of Europe, the USA, and Canada appears to be a Sisyphean task, to put it mildly.

The reprimand given by the European Parliament to Polish MEP Maciej Giertych in March 2007 indicates the dimensions of the problem: The independent MEP, a supporter of Catholic fundamentalism, had placed an EU logo on a pamphlet he had written and distributed, thus giving the false impression that it was an official publication. Under the title “Civilizations at War in Europe”, Giertych had disseminated racist, anti-Semitic stereotypes.²

Statements were issued describing him – rightly – as a propagandist of a grotesque moral outlook, yet the problem is not solved by such acts of disassociation and censure. How many devout Catholics in Poland who believe in the anti-Semitic tirades of Radio Maryja does the deranged MEP stand for? How near or far are his published thoughts from official Polish policy? The MEP’s son was the education minister in Poland’s conservative government, the head of the right-wing populist clerical-national party, the “League of Polish Families”, and a deputy prime minister. He has garnered attention far beyond Poland’s borders for campaigns that encourage intolerance of gays, the stigmatisation of freemasons, and the cultivation of conspiracy theories. With regard to anti-Semitism, he has maintained a low profile, even if both Giertyches, father and son, do recognize the anti-Semite Roman Dmowski

1 OSCE, Bulgarian Chairmanship, The Chairman-in-Office, Berlin Declaration of 29 April 2004, available online at: http://www.osce.org/documents/cio/2004/04/2828_en.pdf; also reprinted in: Gert Weisskirchen, The OSCE Anti-Semitism Conference in Berlin, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2004*, Baden-Baden 2005, pp. 317-328, here: pp. 326-327.

2 Cf. EU-Parlament rügt antisemitischen Abgeordneten [European Parliament Censures Anti-Semitic Member], in: *Der Tagesspiegel*, Berlin, 15 March 2007.

(1864-1939), an influential patriotic ideologue and writer between the wars, as the founder of their line.³

The Polish education minister has recently attempted to distance himself from Dmowski's anti-Semitism and national socialism (and from Radio Maryja). However, although he asserted that the anti-Semitism and nationalism of the inter-war years were mistakes, Giertych's arguments still contain standard anti-Jewish rhetorical techniques. One example of this is the marginalization of the problem: Anti-Semitism at Polish universities between the wars was abhorrent, but it is historical and can therefore be laid to rest. After asking in astonishment: "Was it really all that bad?", Giertych explains Dmowski's anti-Semitism using the same political cynicism: "Dmowski did not like Jews, incidentally quite unlike me, as I like Jews", only then to remark that there had at the time been "an objective economic conflict between the Jews and the Poles". Giertych has argued that the populist anti-Semitic slogans of the national movement were quite wrong and that there were Jews in the National Party, "even at the highest level".⁴ These are stereotypes that are always used to defend against accusations of anti-Semitism. But Jews are still seen as fundamentally alien, the majority continues to feel justified in defending itself against the minority, and defensive excesses are considered as regrettable historical errors. This position, a kind of latent anti-Semitism, is admittedly far from open Jew-hating, but nor does it provide a stable basis upon which relations between the majority and a minority can proceed in a spirit of democratic tolerance. Polish anti-Semitism is, however, very much a case of Jew-hating without Jews.

The situation in Hungary is highlighted by another contemporary example. In March 2007, reformed church pastor Loránt Hegedüs jr., a right-wing extremist, allowed the British anti-Semite and Holocaust denier David Irving, who is no stranger to the courts, to speak in his church. The far right Hungarian Truth and Life Party (MIEP) engaged the Neo-Nazi, who had just finished serving a fourteen-month sentence in Austria, to speak at a rally. The shock and dismay expressed by the reformed church in Austria at their Hungarian colleague does nothing to mitigate the openness of an intolerant public to anti-Semitic messages and can do little to reduce the freedom of action of the pastor who made the invitation.⁵ Hungarian anti-Semitism – of which this is also a case – is by no means limited to the unenlightened and uneducated petite bourgeoisie and the rural classes. Anti-Semitism is a common and oft-voiced tendency among Hungarian intellectuals. After a member of its board made anti-Semitic statements, the Hungarian Writers' Association lost some 200 members – arguably the best, most creative and most famous authors –

3 Cf. Ulrich M. Schmid, Hüter der polnischen Kultur [Keeper of Polish Culture], in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 1 December 2006.

4 Interview with Roman Giertych, in: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 16 2006. For bringing this to my attention and translating it, I would like to thank Yasemin Shooman.

5 Cf. Aufmarsch von rechts außen [March of the Far Right], in: *Der Standard*, Vienna, 16 March 2007.

between 1990 and 2004, but it has never distanced itself from the stigmatizing characterization of the Jews as alien and the enemy of the Hungarian people. Imre Kertész, one of the authors who left the association, explains the anti-Semitism of Hungarian intellectuals in terms of anxiety psychosis. Istvan Eörsi, another author who left the association, has cited a need to explain national catastrophes such as the 1920 Treaty of Trianon as the fault of “the Jews”. The stereotypical form this exclusion takes is to claim that the Jews seek to oppress the Hungarians.⁶

Kertész, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, also diagnoses the confusion of those who became disoriented and ceased to understand the world following the fall of Communism. In seeking to overcome their own alienation by furiously attacking the foreign, many people seek salvation in a shameless identification with the nation: “The anti-Semites in the Hungarian Writers’ Association are not yet familiar with European etiquette and perform their work in public [...] I would even say unhindered. There are neither laws nor public protests to stop them.”⁷ The poet Kornél Döbrentei, an association member who has publicly struck such poses, provoking protests on the part of his associates, is naturally vehement in denying accusations that he is an anti-Semite and threatens anyone who accuses him of being such with legal action.⁸ The alarming aspect of the Hungarian situation is that anti-Semitism is supported by intellectuals with political influence and social standing. This does not improve the prospects for educational campaigns and consciousness-raising activities. The poor results of far-right parties in elections is therefore no comfort, given the popularity of anti-Semitism among the population.⁹

In France, the European country with the largest Jewish population (ca. 575,000 out of a total population of 58.5 million), Jews are, in contrast to other ethnic groups, both the victims of publicly manifested anti-Semitism and of physical violence, intimidation, and assaults. Year on year, the number of violent anti-Semitic incidents rose by 45 per cent in 2006 to 112. According to the umbrella organization of French Jewish organizations, the *Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France*, the Jewish community’s protection service registered 371 cases of manifest anti-Semitism, a rise of 24 per cent.¹⁰

6 Cf. Istvan Eörsi, *Peinliche Verschleppung* [Distressing Perpetuation], in: *taz*, 20 April 2004.

7 Imre Kertész, *Ein Mythos geht zu Ende* [End of a Myth], in: *Die Zeit*, 1 April 2004 (author’s translation).

8 Cf. Kathrin Lauer, *Glühende Kugeln* [Red Hot Cannon Balls], in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15 March 2004.

9 Cf. *Lautstarker ungarischer Antisemitismus – Parteienstreit und Schuldzuweisung statt Strategiedebatte* [Hungary’s Vocal Anti-Semitism – Party Political Point-Scoring and Accusations instead of Debates on Strategy], in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 9 October 2004.

10 Cf. *Jüdische Allgemeine/dpa*, 1 March 2007. Figures and trends such as these should be considered first and foremost as a reflection of the perceptions of the victims: They indicate how Jewish communities perceive their own position and the threats that face them. The Annual Report of the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-

Such events and their background are troublesome enough, regardless of the scale of the incidents: The exponents of aggressive anti-Semitism are young immigrants from the Maghreb, West Africa, and the Caribbean, who turn to anti-Semitism as a result of their low social status and despair of ever rising higher in French society. They believe that Jews are rich and possess power and influence that they use to hinder the attempts of immigrants to better their positions. The kidnapping, holding to ransom, and murder of the 23-year-old Ilan Halimi, a Jew of Moroccan origin, by a gang of young Muslims is an alarming development. The protests of tens of thousands of French people, who demonstrated against the aggressive anti-Semitism of the immigrant underclass will neither impress the culprits and those who seek to copy them nor improve their social situation. These immigrants are fighting a war against the indigenous society, and their armoury includes belief in conspiracy theories that hold “the Jews” responsible for their own misfortune.

This is a particular problem for France, which has not only the largest Jewish community but also the highest number of Muslims in Europe – roughly six million, or ten per cent of the population.¹¹ Only a small percentage of Muslims are deeply religious, yet almost half admit to serious prejudice against Jews. Significantly, the degree of prejudice depends on the level of education. In the French Afro-Caribbean community, Dieudonné M’bala M’bala, a comedian of Breton and Cameroonian ancestry, has used his public influence to great effect. He holds “the Jews” responsible for the slave trade and has criticized the French nation for commemorating the Holocaust but not the older – and for the descendants of its victims more important – crime of the slave trade. Dieudonné, as he is generally known, describes commemoration of the Shoah as “memorial pornography” and the state of Israel as a racist and colonial nation comparable to Nazi Germany. Young immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean are not the only people to have proved receptive to the popular comedian’s views.¹² In France, everyday manifestations of anti-Semitism include insults directed at Synagogue-goers, attacks on Jewish nurseries and schools, and vandalism of Jewish cemeteries and other sites.

In many countries in Eastern-Central and Eastern Europe – from Poland to the Baltic states, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus – religious, cultural, and social traditions determine the way the Jewish minority is seen. Often all that remains is a memory of “the Jews”, who, until the Holocaust, had for generations been stigmatised as aliens, used as scapegoats, and annihilated as enemies. The absence of a Jewish population makes as little difference to the inherited antipathy as the remembrance of the genocide of six million Jews

semitism, Tel Aviv, cites 504 anti-Semitic incidents in France in 2005 compared to 974 in 2004, a decline of 48 per cent. Cf. Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive, *Rapport sur l’Anti-Sémitisme en France 2006*.

11 Cf. Colin Nickerson, Antisemitism seen rising among France’s Muslims, in: *The Boston Globe*, 13 March 2006.

12 Cf. Stephen Roth Institute, *Annual Report 2005*, France, p. 9, available online at: <http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/asw2005/france.htm>.

that was carried out on the territories of Poland and the Soviet Union. Nor is the fact that Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Belarusians proved willing assistants to the murderers a means of undermining traditional anti-Semitic passions. Not without reason do representatives of Jews in Central Europe, such as the European Jewish Congress, fear the import of anti-Semitism from the new member states of the European Union.¹³

Negative anti-Semitic stereotypes and prejudice are ubiquitous. In Eastern Europe, they are obstacles to the creation of democratic societies: in Western Europe, they play – mostly surreptitiously and always denied – several roles in excluding the Jewish minority and strengthening the position of the majority. While anti-Semitism remains acceptable in polite company in many countries in Eastern Europe, in the West it is generally only openly articulated by the far right.

Anti-Semitism is – for good reason – probably better controlled and more comprehensively criminalized in Germany than in any other state. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism as an everyday prejudice and a disposition towards a minority has not been banished or defeated as a result. Prejudices, passed on via ancient stereotypes and clichés – “Jewish wealth”, “Jewish deceitfulness”, “Jewish greed for money”, “Jewish efforts to take over the world”, “Jewish dominance of the economy, politics, culture, the media” – are as alive in Germany as in other countries; the most that can be said is that there is a greater reluctance to openly admit to harbouring such negative stereotypes.

Anti-Semitism, hatred of Jews in the broadest sense, creates problems of definition and perception in political and social discourse. There is a common tendency to avoid speaking of anti-Semitism except for instances of open violence or even organized persecution. However, attitudes expressed as reservations and formulated as stereotypes are also examples of discriminatory and exclusive behaviour and therefore everyday expressions of anti-Semitism. Definitions of anti-Semitism always require the reservations to be expressed in relation to Jews as members of a collective and to explicitly refer to the individual “as a Jew”, defined as the holder of alleged characteristics as a result of tradition, religion, and culture.

In order to understand the means by which the prejudice functions, it is necessary to recognize the causal relationships involved: Negative stereotypes both exclude the minority and reinforce the collective identity of the majority. The feeling of unity among the majority turns minorities into aliens that have less worth and are considered legitimate targets. When Jews are defined as alien, when asylum seekers are maligned as criminals, when foreigners are considered to threaten the civil peace and vested interests, this is a reflection of aggression and fear on the part of the majority that need to be dis-

13 Cf. Gefahr im Verzug. Europäischer Jüdischer Kongress warnt vor Antisemitismus in EU-Beitrittsländern [The Danger of Delay. European Jewish Congress Warns of Anti-Semitism in EU Candidate Countries], in: *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 11 November 2004.

mantled and overcome. Anti-Semitism is therefore not to be seen as a prejudice against a particular minority that can be isolated from its social context, but rather as a prototype of social and political *ressentiment* and therefore an indicator of the state of a society. Recognizing this is the first step to overcoming prejudice that seeks to exclude.

Four basic phenomena must be distinguished: First, Christian anti-Judaism – religiously motivated (but also culturally, socially, and economically determined) *ressentiment* directed at the Jews, which has existed since the Middle Ages. Second, pseudo-scientific racial anti-Semitism, backed by anthropological and biological arguments, which emerged in the 19th century and resulted in the Holocaust. The third form of reservation is a contemporary phenomenon that has emerged alongside the traditional forms of anti-Semitism since the Holocaust. Known as secondary anti-Semitism, it is an independent development with low profile; it feeds on feelings of shame and the denial of guilt: *Ressentiment* of the Jews is mobilized not despite Auschwitz but because of it. Secondary anti-Semitism is originally a West German phenomenon, as it attached itself to compensation payments that were not made by the East German state.

However, a different form of anti-Jewish *ressentiment*, anti-Zionism, was integral to East German politics, propaganda, and consequently the socialization of East German citizens. In this context, “anti-Zionism” is not to be understood in its original meaning which refers to the tendency in Jewish thought that rejected the ideas of Theodor Herzl and his successors, i.e. to the disapproval, for theological or other reasons, of the project to create a Jewish national state. Anti-Zionism as propagated and practised by the Eastern Bloc states during the Cold War refers to the rejection of the right of the state of Israel to exist. Today, political propaganda directed against the Jewish state is popular worldwide, and is becoming more so. The four basic forms of anti-Semitism – religious anti-Judaism, racial anti-Semitism, secondary anti-Semitism, and anti-Zionism – form the framework for the observation of anti-Semitism in all its forms and manifestations.

Drawing on a long tradition, stereotypes of Jewish wealth, Jewish business acumen, and greed for money underpin the view that Jews enjoy material advantages, and that they have received – at the expense of the majority, i.e. one’s own well-being – illegitimate reparation payments or outrageous subsidies. An additional motive for anti-Semitism is *petit bourgeois* fear of “excessive alien influence”, which considers “one’s own” to be threatened and conceives of the Jews as “alien”. The Jews are made into scapegoats and are excluded in the same breath as asylum seekers, migrant workers, foreign criminals, and everything alien that creates fear and discomfort.

That the objective fact of anti-Semitism becomes the object of subjective interpretation when attacks and gaffes, scandals, and acts of provocation have to be interpreted can be constantly observed. Wherever there is a need for explanation, the OSCE’s Berlin Declaration does as little as the definition

with which the European Union sought to create a basis for an investigation of the phenomenon of anti-Semitism.¹⁴

In the academic world, Helen Fein's definition carries considerable authority: Anti-Semitism is "a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs towards Jews as a collective manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore and imagery, and in actions – social or legal discrimination, political mobilisation against the Jews, and collective or state violence – which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews."¹⁵ But politicians and media representatives are generally not aware of such aids when they are required to analyse and interpret incidents in everyday life. As a result, there is a tendency to either trivialize or overdramatize such events. This can easily be demonstrated by means of examples. In March 2007, the journalism prize of the state of Salzburg, the René Marcic Prize, was presented as usual. From 1959 to 1964, Marcic was the editor-in-chief of the illustrious *Salzburger Nachrichten* newspaper, but he was at heart a clerical fascist with the past to match. Even after the Holocaust he wrote, contra the author Peter de Mendelssohn and contra the Jews, "He who mocks God and prayer [...] should not be surprised if his degradation of his being should rebound on his own body and he is one day placed in a gas chamber. Mendelssohn and his kind themselves created the world that later persecuted them."¹⁶ Attempts to rename the prize failed not only because of the indolence of conservative politicians, but also because anti-Semitism is continually redefined to meet utilitarian requirements.

Another everyday political collision of interests could be observed in the spring of 2007 when two German bishops made remarkably inappropriate comments during a visit to Israel: They spoke of the "Ghettoization of the Palestinians" and drew comparisons between the Warsaw Ghetto and the situation of the Palestinians in Ramallah. There is no need to explain why the Catholic bishops' comments were scandalous and have to be considered as falling within the circle of anti-Semitism.¹⁷ The Chairman of the Conference of German Bishops, Karl Cardinal Lehmann, expressed his regret, and Curial Cardinal Walter Kasper – seeking to stress that the lapse by the bishops had nothing to do with anti-Semitism – distinguished between the good theological relations that pertain between Christians and Jews and the separate matter of necessary criticism of the state of Israel: "Theological anti-Judaism has

14 Cf. European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), *Antisemitism. Summary Overview of the Situation in the European Union 2001-2005*. Updated version December 2006 (EUMC Working Paper).

15 Helen Fein, Dimensions of Antisemitism: Attitudes, Collective Accusations and Actions, in: Helen Fein (ed.), *The Persisting Question. Sociological Perspectives and Social Contexts of Modern Antisemitism*, Current Research on Antisemitism, vol. 1, ed. by Herbert A. Strauss, Berlin 1987, p. 67.

16 Michael Frank, Umstrittene Auszeichnung. Publikationspreis in Salzburg nach Antisemiten benannt [Controversial Award. Salzburg Journalism Prize Named after Anti-Semite], in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 March 2007 (author's translation).

17 Cf. Daniel Schulz, Schockierende Bischöfe [Shocking Bishops], in: *taz*, 8 March 2007.

been overcome since the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*. Unfortunately, political anti-Semitism continually re-emerges. Here, we Christians need to make it clear: We will not tolerate that.”¹⁸

If only non-tolerance of anti-Semitism in Christian guise were so simple. In Poland, the official church is observing with concern and detachment the activity of the Catholic, patriotic, and fundamentalist radio station “Radio Maryja”, operated by Redemptorist preacher Tadeusz Rydzyk and highly popular. In Russia and other Soviet successor states, too, popular beliefs are confirmed by Orthodox priests and religious dignitaries who recycle traditional anti-Judaic stereotypes such as stories of ritual murder and accusations of deicide. The ecclesiastical sphere remains untouched by the Enlightenment and provides anti-Semitism – not only that which stems from Christianity – with a breeding ground that is unaffected by political resolutions and declarations of intention.

The rejection of anti-Semitism (and similar exclusive ideologies, which are based on hateful stereotypes, frequently violent and always at the cost of the minority) is an essential element of a democratic community of values. How can this rejection be made into the binding conviction of the majority, and how can this conviction be put into practice? What sort of high-level practical recommendations would have to be made by politicians and diplomats in order to ensure that declarations made at the conference table are translated into real changes in civic sentiment?

A relatively loose international organization such as the OSCE has only limited means of affecting cultural and social attitudes and individual behaviour shaped by disparate traditions. Nevertheless, an international community that defines itself in terms of human rights, tolerance, and the rejection of discriminatory ideologies has an important function. The community orients its member nations towards the shared corpus of rules and regulations embodying democratic convictions and the commitments that this entails. At least this establishes a framework. However, these rules and regulations cannot be defined in detail and made binding for the citizens of member states. Nor is it easy to imagine how sanctions could be imposed for infringements of the rules (by politicians, representatives of social institutions, elites, or individuals). That considerably diminishes the value of resolutions, declarations of intention, and invocations, although it does not render them completely worthless.

The declaration made by the German *Bundestag* in December 2003, which called upon every citizen to join in the fight against anti-Semitism, states the goal but does little to indicate the methods: “It is our duty to fight anti-Semitic thought, speech and action. This requires the commitment of every individual. We want to expand the culture of dialogue and mutual

18 “Das dulden wir nicht”. Kurienkardinal Kasper zu Antisemitismus und Ökumene [“We will not tolerate that.” Curial Cardinal Kasper on Anti-Semitism and Ecumenism], in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 March 2007 (author’s translation).

understanding in Germany. The peaceful coexistence of people of different religions must be self-evident enough to ensure that citizens of Jewish faith can make their home in Germany without fear. The struggle against anti-Semitism, racism, and discrimination against minorities is a matter for the whole of society. Where necessary, anti-Semitism must be fought with all the means available to a democratic state under the rule of law, including the police and judiciary.”¹⁹

In remembrance of the murder of six million European Jews in the name of a German ideology, the rejection of anti-Semitism is so deeply rooted in the political culture of the Federal Republic of Germany that the commitments can be enforced, for instance, by criminalizing Holocaust denial. This is not the case in most other countries. The only way to overcome prejudice is via enlightenment. In concrete terms, this means that the education system of every country needs to deal with the origins, effects, and dissolution of hate-filled stereotypes in the necessary breadth and depth. To achieve this, definitions and targets provided by research into prejudice must be laid down in a way that is binding and embedded in teaching curricula.

However, a common canon of educational subject matter is not enough. Enlightenment also requires overcoming national traditions and folk-cultural certainties and habits of thought relating to minorities – and not just the Jews. Exclusivist nationalism and zealotry are the greatest obstacles on the road to a tolerant, multinational democratic society, as the above examples drawn from the phenomenology of European anti-Semitism show. Reaching that still distant goal will require not only major and radical efforts in the field of education. Equally important, if not the prerequisite for all work of enlightenment, is overcoming the tendency to think in terms of nation states. For as long as every appeal to respect human rights can be rejected with patriotic indignation by national governments as intolerable interference in the sovereignty and integrity of the state that is doing the infringing – for instance by tolerating or banalizing anti-Semitism – overcoming this prejudice remains at best an intention, at worst an illusion.

19 82nd session of the German Bundestag, 11 December 2003 (author's translation).