

FACT SHEET

International Conference on Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region April 28-29, 2004

Background:

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is the product of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act (i.e., The Helsinki Process) which led to regional stability and promoted democracy and human rights in Cold War-era Europe. The 55 participating States today include Europe, the Soviet successor states, the United States, and Canada. Much of the impetus for the OSCE Human Dimension was the struggle for Soviet Jewry and U.S. Congressional engagement in U.S. foreign policy and with parliamentarians and civil society in Europe, on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Since the collapse of communism, the human dimension has focused on expanding pluralistic institutions in the new democracies and addressing human rights issues that affect stability in the OSCE region. The Baltic and Central European states in particular, after emerging as democracies for the first time since World War II, have had to address anti-Semitism and Holocaust issues as part of their post-communist transition. Notably, Latvia was outspoken in opposition to the anti-Semitic tenor of debate surrounding the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. In these countries, Holocaust education, tolerance, dialogue and law enforcement are taking root.

Action:

As anti-Semitic violence has raged in Western Europe and the broader OSCE region, the new democracies and the United States – in cooperation with Jewish community and other non-governmental organizations – have pushed to treat anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish violence as region-wide phenomena, unique and separate from other forms of racism, intolerance, and xenophobia. While the immediate crisis is centered in Western Europe, anti-Semitism haunts the entire OSCE region, including North America and the Soviet successor states.

2003: The OSCE's first anti-Semitism conference, June 2003 in Vienna, identified anti-Semitism as a discrete human rights violation and threat to regional stability. The Maastricht Ministerial in December 2003 authorized the second conference in Berlin, and directed the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to begin collecting data on anti-Semitic and other hate crimes, to disseminate information and best practices, and to promote national legislation among OSCE states.

2004: The Berlin conference will build on Vienna and Maastricht, moving beyond speeches to the level of concrete action, with two more groundbreaking features: working sessions as part of the formal conference agenda, and a Declaration of Action that defines anti-Semitism and lists commitments by governments to implement specific actions and mechanisms to combat anti-Semitism at home and to coordinate responses across the OSCE region. In the OSCE tradition, governments and non-governmental organizations will participate jointly in all sessions, allowing for deliberation inside the room as well as outside. Hosted by the German government, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this second conference has the potential to build on Vienna and set down actionable and measurable steps for governments, organizations, and community initiatives. In October, at the OSCE's annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw, member states and ODIHR will have an opportunity to report on their implementation of the Berlin program and consider additional measures and modifications. The U.S. Congress and Executive Branch, whose combined leadership has helped shape and propel this process, will continue to play a key role in ensuring follow-up on Berlin and the broader OSCE mechanism.

For more information, please visit <http://Berlin2004.org>.