

Combating Antisemitism in Europe: Is the OSCE up to the Challenge?

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Abstract

This paper focuses on two of the most recognized and longstanding challenges the OSCE faces in combating antisemitism: security concerns of Jewish communities and the importance of a common and comprehensive definition of antisemitism. Drawing on the author's personal experiences in his role as Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism, it then examines key turning points in the OSCE's approach to combating antisemitism, looking at the challenges specific to the OSCE's organizational structure, funding, and decision-making principles, before finally reflecting on possibilities for restoring the OSCE's leadership role in combating antisemitism going forward.

Keywords

OSCE, ODIHR, antisemitism, terrorism, Jewish community security

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Introduction

On a sunny April afternoon in 2004, I found myself walking alongside Ambassador Christian Strohal, Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), on our way to the German Chancellery. The high-level OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism¹ had just concluded, and we were headed to a closing reception hosted by Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder. By all accounts, this had been

a milestone in efforts to get the OSCE to address the resurgence of antisemitism in Europe.

The German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, and the Bulgarian Chairperson-in-Office, Foreign Minister Solomon Passy, presided over the meetings, and many participating States attended at that same high level. The previous year, I had worked closely with the US Ambassador to the OSCE, Steve Minikes, in efforts to convince the organization to mount a first conference, which took place in Vienna in June 2003. It placed antisemitism clearly on the agenda, but there was no certainty of any follow-up until the German delegation announced in the closing session that Berlin would host a second conference.

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Now we had both this 2004 conference and the important Berlin Declaration² that was issued at its conclusion. The 2004 Berlin Declaration called on ODIHR to “follow closely...anti-Semitic incidents in the OSCE area making use of all reliable information available.”³ It was asked to “systematically collect and disseminate information throughout the OSCE area on best practices for preventing and responding to anti-Semitism and, if requested, offer advice to participating States in their efforts to fight anti-Semitism.”

I was naturally buoyed by this outcome but Christian Strohal had a sour look on his face. “It is easy to give us more responsibilities,” he told me. “But will anyone give us the necessary support to carry them out?”

That Berlin Conference and Declaration resulted in ever-increasing attention to the problem of antisemitism and genuine efforts to address it. In some ways, the OSCE was uniquely positioned to do this. Combating antisemitism fell squarely within its human dimension mandate. The United States, one of the most forceful voices calling for more active measures, sat around the same table as European governments. Once adopted, OSCE commitments – even though they lacked legal enforcement – were taken seriously by those participating States where the problem was most acute. Arguably, the lengthy internal debate over the precise wording of the Berlin Declaration reflected an understanding that the words mattered, and States would pay heed.

Only some weeks after the OSCE Berlin Conference, the European Monitoring

Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) issued its first report on antisemitism in the European Union.⁴ The report consisted of two parts. One drew primarily on the limited data available from incident reports and attitude surveys as assembled by the EUMC monitors in Member States. The second was a compilation of interviews with European Jewish leaders. Those interviews offered an alarming picture, revealing a level of anxiety that had not been seen for decades. Citing the increase in antisemitic incidents and weak government reaction, some even questioned the future of Jewish communal life. The EUMC itself also indicated that its monitors were hampered by the lack (for most) of any definition of antisemitism and the lack (for the remainder) of a common definition.⁵

For this paper, I will look back at some key turning points in the OSCE’s approach to combating antisemitism, first by focusing on two of the most recognized and longstanding challenges: security concerns of Jewish communities and the importance of employing a common and comprehensive definition of antisemitism. I will then look at the specific context of the OSCE, where organizational factors such as funding, decision-making, and the consensus principle also pose a challenge, before reflecting on the opportunities for the incoming Chairmanship to restore the OSCE’s leadership role in combating antisemitism.

Addressing Jewish community security concerns

In February 2020, the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship hosted a conference in Tirana on combating antisemitism in the OSCE region. This followed a tradition of holding such a conference early in the year, established by the Italian Chairperson-in-Office in 2018 and continued by the Slovak Chairperson-in-Office in 2019. The Tirana Conference, organized in cooperation with ODIHR, notably included the participation of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, together with representatives from other international organizations, participating States, and civil society. The conference offered recommendations for all to take. Only two weeks after the conference, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly organized a special session at its Winter Meeting in Vienna for parliamentarians to debate the problem of antisemitism.

We had anticipated that throughout the year there would be additional opportunities to follow up on these recommendations at Supplemental Human Dimension Meetings, meetings of the Permanent Council, and scheduled country visits of the Personal Representatives. The renewed engagement of the Parliamentary Assembly, whose resolutions presaged the first OSCE conferences on antisemitism, would add yet another valuable advocate. Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic brought an abrupt stop to these plans. Although important Human Dimension Implementation Meetings could still take place in a virtual,

Zoom-based format, they could not allow for the side events and informal get-togethers of civil society organizations and participating States that have also become an important part.

Data on antisemitic incidents over the years and through 2019 has generally shown increases and plateaus.⁶ Some fluctuations may also be due to changes in reporting and collection. When 2020 data is reported, experts anticipate a decline in the number of physical incidents, explained by the fact that the coronavirus pandemic has shuttered schools and synagogues and kept most people at home. But no one takes comfort in this. We have witnessed the spread of antisemitism and conspiracy theories linking Jews to the virus on all social media platforms. We know there will be long-term economic consequences because of the pandemic. When normal life returns to our cities, we should expect that antisemitism will return to the streets, as well. If anything, this ought to be the time to ramp up our security training and preparations to combat it.

In 2009 and the years following, I was afforded the opportunity as the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism to take up the issue in official country visits.⁷ I would meet first with leaders and representatives of Jewish communities and key civil society organizations, and then with government leaders. Assessing the security needs and concerns of the Jewish community and the government response was an important element of these visits. While the situation was different in each country, Western Euro-

pean Jewish communities were generally contending with two types of threats. They were targets of radical Islamist extremists who had embarked on an international terror campaign, and thus they had reason to fear for their lives. They were also regular victims of verbal and physical harassment, which eroded the comfort and security of their day-to-day routine.

I raised the issue at the time, and participating States recognized that antisemitism was real and security fears were genuine. But that did not necessarily mean they were being adequately addressed. In fact, I was surprised and disheartened in my meetings with government officials at the overall lack of action and excuses for not doing more. By way of illustration, at meetings with Dutch officials in the Hague, I was told that the government could not provide any enhanced security for synagogues without also providing the same to churches and mosques, even though these other religious buildings did not face similar security threats. Lacking the wherewithal to provide it everywhere, they provided it nowhere, and Jewish communities were right to feel abandoned.

In Belgium, government authorities told me they believed Jewish community buildings in Brussels merited the same threat level as the Embassy of Israel. But they admitted that they lacked the budget to provide the security to synagogues and Jewish schools that they themselves considered necessary.

In Denmark, the Jewish Community in Copenhagen had asked for a visible police presence in front of its community

centre and schools at the times of greatest use, but they were rebuffed. When I brought this up to government officials, I was told that positioning armed police in front of buildings was not a common practice, and it would likely make the general population uneasy. In their calculations, this outbalanced the genuine security interests of the Jewish community. Five months after my visit, an unarmed Jewish community security guard was killed in a terrorist attack in front of the Copenhagen synagogue.

On a first country visit to Sweden, I learned that the Stockholm Jewish community was spending a quarter of its entire budget on security. On a subsequent visit, I was told the government had responded to security concerns by allocating a fixed sum of money to each religious community building for security enhancements. However, even though the Stockholm community had centralized its school and most communal activities in a newly opened downtown building, this hub of community activity was only eligible for the same help provided for a single church or synagogue.

There are, of course, other examples, but they all illustrate the very real gap that existed between Jewish community security needs and the limited understanding and assistance they were receiving from their governments. While the OSCE was not the only organization that took up this issue, a brief review of how the OSCE, ODIHR, key participating States and civil society groups came together to address the problem demonstrates the unique role that the OSCE played.

On 19 March 2012, an Islamist terrorist entered a Jewish school in Toulouse, France and brutally murdered a rabbi and three small children. These killings followed two previous incidents where the same terrorist shot four French soldiers of Muslim background. Before the terrorist was identified, law enforcement had assumed he was acting out of right-wing, ultranationalist convictions. There was broad, public revulsion at all the murders. But when he was named and surrounded by police and the truth of his motivations became clear, some of that solidarity with the Jewish community faded away.

The French Jewish Community had a well-functioning security organization which conducted its own review. Schools were particularly vulnerable at the start of the day, when parents and children are coming and going, and even secure entry doors may be left open. Surveillance cameras revealed that the terrorist had first checked out the school earlier that morning before launching his attack, but those living nearby did not notice the suspicious behaviour, or did not report it. Community leaders were unsure about sharing the details of the attack because they were so horrific, yet they would demonstrate how well-grounded were their fears.

As Personal Representative, I proposed to the Chairperson-in-Office that we organize a conference on Jewish community security. While there was support for such a conference, it would take some months before all the necessary components could be put in place. The 2013 OSCE Ukrainian Chairmanship agreed

to make Jewish community security part of its programme. The German Government offered to host the conference, and German Interior Minister, Dr Hans-Peter Friedrich, agreed to give the keynote address. We formed a planning committee that included representatives of key civil society organizations (European Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee in Berlin, Central Council of Jews in Germany), the director of ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department (TND), and German officials. The conference, titled "Addressing the Security Needs of Jewish Communities in the OSCE region: Challenges and Good Practices", took place in Berlin in June 2013.⁸ Notably, the conference offered joint presentations of Jewish community security leaders together with their respective government and law enforcement partners from four key participating States. They could lay out both the challenges they faced and offer their own examples of how they cooperated to deal with them. Those examples and the presentations of other speakers resulted in detailed recommendations issued in the conference report.

The following year, Michael Georg Link assumed the position of ODIHR Director. As a former State Secretary in the German Foreign Ministry, he was well-aware of that conference, its recommendations, and the supportive role that the German government played. In November 2014, the Berlin Plus Ten Conference convened in Berlin, providing an opportunity for governments and civil society to review the problem of antisemitism in the OSCE region ten years after the

Berlin Declaration was issued.⁹ In the concluding remarks, the Swiss Chairmanship specifically called on “law-enforcement agencies to address the very real threats to Jewish community security”.¹⁰ Director Link laid out an ambitious plan to address the growing problem of antisemitism in the OSCE region, with a focus on the special security concerns of Jewish communities. His ODIHR TND Director and staff drew up a detailed extra-budgetary proposal called “Words into Action to Address Anti-Semitism”. The German Government agreed to provide the substantial funds necessary to implement this project.

Supplemental ODIHR staff were hired to manage and develop Words into Action. They, in turn, convened several meetings with experts from participating States and with Jewish community representatives who had direct experience with security issues and thus could identify the special problems, the best practice experiences, and what ideally should come from governments. This resulted in the publication of “Understanding Anti-Semitic Hate Crimes and Addressing the Security Needs of Jewish Communities: A Practical Guide”.¹¹

This guide explains the problem and provides instruction to participating States and law enforcement on recognizing antisemitic hate crimes and dealing with their victims. Its appended documents include a concise explanation of Judaism and Jewish holidays, important for knowing when to be on heightened alert. They offer a table showing what other people, including parliamentarians, and religious and civil society leaders,

can do. And, notably, they include the Working Definition of Antisemitism. The guide has been translated and is now available in thirteen languages.

It is no less important that the guide is an official publication of the OSCE/ODHIR. It follows on the articulated commitments of participating States expressed in multiple ministerial decisions. Thus, there is a unique opening to individual governments for the direct presentation of the guide and its examples as part of national law enforcement training. This, too, was a significant part of the Words into Action programme plan, also supported by the extra-budgetary contributions.

The development and publication of the security guide was a high point in OSCE efforts to address the most immediate challenge facing Jewish communities. Those at ODIHR who developed it had anticipated a robust second phase to promote its use by law enforcement in training sessions throughout the OSCE region. However, ODIHR ended its contract with the professional team that had been hired for the Words into Action to Address Anti-Semitism project, and sought to redirect the remaining extra-budgetary funds to a new, more generic project to fight intolerance, of which antisemitism would be only one part. When told the funds could not be repurposed, it scheduled several new training programmes, but the long-term plans remained unchanged.

Defining antisemitism

The first step in fighting antisemitism is defining it.

Antisemitism can be a form of racism and xenophobia, but it also defies our general assumptions about intolerance. It is present in places where there are significant Jewish communities; it is present where hardly any Jews reside. It matters little whether Jews are new arrivals akin to other immigrant groups, or have been in countries for centuries. Conspiracy theories may defy any logic – Jews are simultaneously behind communism and capitalism – but that does nothing to impede their spread. Age-old antisemitic tropes are easily repurposed for contemporary circumstances. Jews bore responsibility for the Black Plague in medieval times; they are now behind today's coronavirus pandemic. Jews were once accused of murdering Christians for blood needed in their rituals; now this ancient “blood libel” is applied to Israel's treatment of Palestinians. The Holocaust is surely the most documented crime of genocide in the modern era; yet there are those who deny its existence or its scope. They do so not out of any interest in historical accuracy, but as another means of inflicting pain on Holocaust survivors and their brethren.

The need to be able to describe and convey this complex understanding of antisemitism and the multiple forms it can take was frequently voiced by participants at the OSCE conferences on antisemitism in 2003 and 2004. At the invitation of the EUMC Director, some of us came together in the autumn of 2004

to draft a new, comprehensive definition of antisemitism to remedy this. I was there in my role as the American Jewish Committee's Director of International Jewish Affairs. But our working group included representatives of European Jewish organizations, the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), and ODIHR's recently established TND unit. A consensus agreement was reached in January 2005, and in March the results were issued in what came to be known as the EUMC Working Definition of Antisemitism. Intended as an educational tool for governments and civil society, it included a set of easily understood examples of antisemitism, including those relating to Israel. When that work concluded and the EUMC Working Definition of Antisemitism was issued, ODIHR included it in the materials it compiled for its new police training programmes to address hate crimes.

The EUMC Working Definition drew considerable attention from both supporters and detractors for including examples of antisemitism related to the State of Israel. Some voiced concern that it could be used to label critics of Israel as antisemites, even though the definition explicitly stated that, “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.”¹² Meanwhile, Jewish community leaders pointed out that anti-Israel demonstrations frequently turned antisemitic and in some cases even led to physical attacks on Jewish targets, yet authorities deemed them political in nature and they were not treated as hate crimes.

For them, these examples were among the most important.

One might have expected that the OSCE and ODIHR, with its commitments to address antisemitism, would be in the forefront of efforts to promote the adoption and use of the Working Definition. And yet, despite notable actions by certain individuals and some participating States, it has had a mixed record.

Several individual OSCE participating States employed the EUMC Working Definition. These included the United Kingdom, which inserted it in its training manual for police cadets, and the United States which used it in preparing the State Department's first international report on antisemitism. In 2009, the EUMC was subsumed under the new and larger EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). In March of that year, as the OSCE Personal Representative, I convened a roundtable discussion in Vienna under the Greek Chairmanship and in cooperation with ODIHR that brought together the leaders of Jewish communities in the OSCE region. The newly appointed director of FRA also attended the meeting. Those Jewish leaders, who valued the Working Definition, queried him on whether and how FRA would continue to promote it. While several years later he would decide that it was not in FRA's mandate to provide definitions of antisemitism or of any other form of intolerance, he told participants at that meeting that the definition would remain for them to use. True to his word, it was maintained on the FRA website, but unlike other documents that had been carried over to the new agency, the Working

Definition of Antisemitism stood alone with the old EUMC logo.

In 2013, FRA removed the EUMC Working Definition from its website altogether, saying this was part of a broader cleanup and reminding people that it was not in the definition business. It took the position that minorities and other victim groups should define for themselves the prejudice they face. They also pointed out that a recent survey they conducted of Jewish perception and experience of antisemitism in the EU did include a form of antisemitism relating to Israel as one example that respondents could choose. In fact, it was among the highest polled.¹³ Although it was now an institutional "orphan," the EUMC Working Definition continued to be recommended as a means for governments to recognize antisemitism's multi-dimensional nature, and a growing number of OSCE participating States made use of it.

At the November 2014 OSCE Berlin Plus Ten Conference, the Swiss Chairperson-in-Office made specific reference to the definition in his summary of the meeting's conclusions, stating that the OSCE participating States:

Noted that the Working Definition of Anti-Semitism, disseminated by the EUMC in 2005 and employed by monitoring organizations in various OSCE participating States, remains a useful document for governments and civil society in explaining how anti-Zionism is frequently a mask for anti-Semitism, and Jewish communities are often targets for anti-Israel animus.¹⁴

In January 2015, I attended a meeting of special envoys in Prague. Several countries, including the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany, had appointed special envoys to address antisemitism. The European Commission had recently named a special Coordinator on the issue. ODIHR's new TND Director was also at the table. While the discussion was a broad one, it did include an animated exchange on the Working Definition and ways to promote it and put it to use. As each one described what was being done in their respective countries and organizations, I was surprised to hear the TND Director state that ODIHR could not use the Working Definition unless it had the consensus endorsement of all OSCE participating States. Was she unaware that her two predecessors had already made use of the Working Definition in materials they prepared? Did the recent recommendations from OSCE's Chairperson-in-Office not provide sufficient justification?

When Germany assumed the OSCE Chair in 2016, it made the fight against antisemitism one of its priorities. As Personal Representative, I worked closely with the Head of its OSCE Task Force and with Ambassador Felix Klein, the Foreign Ministry's Special Representative for Relations with Jewish Organizations and Issues relating to Antisemitism. Also, meeting in May 2016 in Bucharest, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), an organization of 31 countries at the time, adopted the original EUMC Working Definition of Antisemitism with minor edits. It again had a home and was henceforth known as the

IHRA Working Definition. The German Chairmanship resolved to secure the OSCE adoption of the Working Definition as a Ministerial decision at the end of the year.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2016, Germany made extensive efforts to secure the support of individual participating States. It *démarched* ambassadors and convened a special meeting of representatives in Berlin. It sought endorsement from all the EU Member States so their respective ambassadors to the OSCE in Vienna would speak with one voice. When we heard that the Danish Government had reservations, Ambassador Klein and I made a special trip to Copenhagen. We assumed they had problems with the Working Definition's examples of antisemitism relating to Israel and strategized between us on how to address them. But we were mistaken. The Danish Foreign Office needed to be certain that Germany *genuinely* wanted this decision, and the Chairperson-in-Office meant what he said. (He did.) Once confirmed, Denmark came on board.

Well into this campaign, we realized that no one had yet drafted the proposed decision. No one wanted to open the entire definition to possible additions or deletions from each participating State. As such, a proposed decision was prepared in early September that spoke only about adopting the IHRA Working Definition with a link to the full definition on the IHRA website. In that way, the text of the definition and its examples could not be subject to editing. As we approached the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, we were optimistic that consensus agreement was within reach.

But we had not considered the Russian Federation, which had so far withheld its support. Trying to understand their objections, I met with their delegation at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. They voiced two concerns with the draft decision. First, since Russia was not a member of IHRA, they objected to a decision that endorsed an IHRA definition. (Many OSCE participating States were not IHRA members either, but that did not preclude their support.) Second, they said their own Russian Jewish experts disagreed with the actual definition. (I had until then heard nothing myself from Russian Jewish leaders). I asked if these were the only two problems they had. In reply I was told, “Yes, for now.” It was hard not to conclude that if a new problem were needed, they would find it.

In October, the Russian Jewish Congress organized an international conference on antisemitism in Moscow. Aware of the pending OSCE decision debate, it adopted a resolution placing Russian Jewish leaders clearly behind adoption of the Working Definition¹⁵ and eliminating at least one excuse.

Arriving in Hamburg on the eve of the December 2016 Ministerial Meeting, there was little optimism. Most draft decisions still lacked consensus support, and the decision on adopting the Working Definition was among them. A late evening meeting took place between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Chairperson-in-Office Frank-Walter Steinmeier to see if some agreement could be found. Early the next morning, I heard from Ambassador Klein, who had positive news. While other draft decisions remained

deadlocked, it appeared that an agreement on endorsing the Working Definition was possible. We were – at least for a few hours – elated. The understanding reached between the two Ministers was that Russia would support the decision if two modest changes were made: the way in which IHRA is identified in the text, and additional language stating that OSCE adoption of the definition should be considered a first step toward reaching a global consensus. We saw no problem in accepting these changes as we gathered for that morning’s drafting session. But when the Russian delegation took the floor to propose changes, there were not two but many, including substantial new language and deleting altogether the essential link to the full IHRA definition. It was clear that there could be no compromise, and at this time Minister Lavrov himself was already flying back to Moscow. The draft decision was withdrawn from consideration.

In 2017, the Austrian Chairmanship considered making another effort to secure an OSCE Ministerial Decision adopting the Working Definition. However, during the year it became evident that the impasse we faced in 2016 was still present. We reluctantly concluded that a second unsuccessful effort might prove counterproductive. Despite the obvious support from an overwhelming majority of participating States, some might claim that repeated Ministerial failure should further limit its use. As noted above, the Working Definition is included in the appendix of the OSCE/ODIHR Words into Action guide on Jewish community security, as well as in the guide for policymakers on addressing antisemitism

through education.¹⁶ However, it is not a central component of these guides as it was in the early ODIHR police training programme.

In the meantime, other international bodies and individual governments have made considerable progress in adopting the Working Definition and recommending its use. A European Council declaration in 2018 called on EU Member States to adopt it.¹⁷ In his first report on antisemitism in 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief called for UN Members to use the definition and reprinted it in full.¹⁸ Even the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights has since restored the Working Definition to its website and is formally polling all EU Member States on how they are employing the definition in their national plans to combat antisemitism. In 2020, Germany assumed the Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and the EU Presidency in the second half of the year, with a commitment to keep a strong focus on combating antisemitism.

Challenges posed by the OSCE's structure and working methods

The organization's consensus decision-making process makes swift and decisive actions more difficult. This not only presents a challenge to the adoption of Ministerial decisions, which is well known, but can also be an impediment or, worse still, used as an excuse by those who have the authority to make decisions but fail to exercise it. A Chairperson-in-Office has flexibility in mounting an expert

conference or supporting a Personal Representative's travel. ODIHR senior staff have considerable freedom in recommending speakers or drawing up an annotated agenda. Yet, delays or lack of action are not only the result of wanting to bring allies into the process. Sometimes they are only responding to anticipated criticism that might not even come.

What has evolved as OSCE "common practice" has also delayed or diluted efforts. Ambassadors in Vienna often speak of taking a "holistic" approach, insisting that combating antisemitism should be part of a larger effort to fight intolerance. What on the face of it may be a high-minded and principled position has made it more difficult to recognize the unique elements of antisemitism and the special challenges facing Jewish communities. Additionally, the OSCE's legitimate interest in geographic balance has not necessarily made for better conferences or the most effective country visits. The problem of antisemitism, the size and concerns of Jewish communities, and the presence of recognized experts are not uniformly distributed throughout the OSCE region.

Each OSCE Chairpersonship has determined its own priorities for its year in office. Some have paid more attention to the fight against antisemitism than others, although none in my experience has ignored it. This, of course, has made a difference at least in the specific programmes, expert conferences, and decision proposals that the Chairperson-in-Office undertakes. Ambassador Strohal raised the question about the necessary support ODIHR would need to play its role. I believe that question

has been answered: there were and are participating States ready to help. But the importance of the ODIHR Director and their personal commitment cannot be overstated. One Director's attention and activism has resulted in pathbreaking work with a significant impact on addressing antisemitism. Another's indifference has thwarted efforts, even when the Chairmanship has asked for more.

Despite offers from key participating States to support future ODIHR programmes targeting antisemitism, the Director remained firm in her decision to press ahead to seek extra-budgetary funds only for the much broader and more generally focused new Words into Action programme. The departure of senior TND staff and the vacancy of the expert advisor on antisemitism at ODIHR this year further hobbled their efforts.

Prospects for the future

The Prime Minister of Sweden, Stefan Löfven, had planned to host an international conference in Malmö in October 2020 with a significant focus on combating antisemitism. This would also have been an opportunity to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Stockholm Conference, which gave birth to the IHRA. In January 2020, Löfven gave his full-throated endorsement of the IHRA Working Definition, which would also be addressed by conference participants.¹⁹

It was also anticipated that security concerns facing Jewish communities would be highlighted, as they have been a significant challenge to the Malmö

Jewish community. Meanwhile, since the terrorist attack on the synagogue in neighbouring Copenhagen in 2015, the Danish Government has worked closely with Scandinavian Jewish security professionals to develop a new, cooperative approach that has won praise from onetime critics. A new, best practice model was ready to be shared.

While the coronavirus pandemic has led to the postponement of the conference until October 2021, it has the fortuitous result of placing the conference squarely in the year of Sweden's OSCE Chairpersonship. It should follow that Sweden will make the fight against antisemitism a key component of its plan as Chair, and will also be afforded the opportunity to draw on the resources of ODIHR. A new ODIHR Director and new professional leadership in the TND Department could offer genuine assistance. With the help and support of other participating States, we could see the OSCE resuming a leadership role in the fight against antisemitism.

Antisemitism is sometimes referred to as the world's oldest hatred. Unfortunately, it must still be addressed in the present tense.

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