



United States Mission to the OSCE

OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism Introductory Remarks For Session 4

As prepared for delivery by Mayor Edward Koch
Head of U.S. Delegation
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Thank you, Mr. Moderator

In the interest of expediting the debate and allowing as many interventions as possible from the floor, I will limit myself to laying out a general framework for the issues that relate to anti-Semitism and posing a number of basic questions about the role of the media in conveying and in countering prejudice.

The media can play either a positive or a negative role in the fight against anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance.

On the positive side, there are many ways in which the media can counter prejudice and promote tolerance. They all have in common that the relevant media figures take their professional duties seriously, that they recognize their responsibility for shaping public views, and that they encourage the voices of reason and humanity.

On the negative side of the equation, we can all cite many examples of articles, broadcasts and websites that stir up hatred and appeal to the most primitive prejudices.

So I'm going to turn over the floor to you, my dear colleagues, with the hope that together we can begin today to find constructive answers to the following questions:

- How can the media report on the activities of minority populations, and specifically of the Jewish communities in our countries, to promote better understanding among the general population?
- Are there ways that governments can encourage the media to report more objectively on domestic developments affecting the Jewish community, or on international developments, while fully respecting freedom of the media? What are the special responsibilities of state-owned media in this regard?
- How can we isolate those extremist publicists who convey anti-Semitic or other hateful messages from the mainstream of respectable, responsible media professionals?

- How should media respond to anti-Semitic statements and images, quickly and firmly, to make sure our populations get an objective view?

My own style is to be blunt, to confront the adversary, to “tell it like it is.” If you’re in the media business, I think you need to report on hate crimes in all their ugliness. But you also need to report on the joys of Jewish life, and the benefits for everyone of living in a tolerant, multicultural society.

If you’re in the education business, you need to make sure that citizens know all about the horrors of the Holocaust. But you also need to teach about the positive experiences of the ensuing decades in overcoming the Nazi legacy in Germany and beyond.

If you are the public consumer of media messages, you need to reject bias and demand fairness. You need to view the media with a critical eye, and to distinguish between responsible and irresponsible journalism. Finally, when you encounter examples of intolerance in the media, even subtle ones, you need to speak out, whether through letters to the editor or e-mails to the producer, or simply by spreading the word in your community. I hope that these broad principles will help to stimulate a fruitful debate this morning.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.