



Translation

OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism in Vienna, 18 - 20 June 2003

Speech by Claudia Roth, Member of the German Bundestag and Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid at the Federal Foreign Office

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished colleagues,
Friends in the fight against anti-Semitism,

Allow me to stress the great importance of this OSCE conference, which will set both an example and a new direction in the worldwide struggle against anti-Semitism and which we hope, and are indeed confident, will lead to joint international strategies and action.

For me personally, it is a great honour and a very great challenge to talk here today as the Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and as representative of the Federal Republic of Germany, whose moral imperative and whose very special historical responsibility is expressed in Article 1 of the Basic Law:

"Human dignity shall be inviolable."

Our policies and our legislation are derived from and aimed at the inviolability of human dignity – not the dignity of Germans, of Christians, of men or of white people but, rather, the dignity of each individual!

As Yosyp Zisels stated yesterday evening, anti-Semitism, this special form of racism, is not the problem of Jews. It is the problem of non-Jews. Therefore, it is also my problem.

The fight against anti-Semitism is a task for society as a whole, in which all social forces and constitutional bodies must work together. They must join forces to fight any attempt to stir up anti-Semitic sentiment aimed at winning votes or creating a hostile atmosphere. For – and I am speaking here on behalf of the Federal Government and the entire German Parliament – action against any form of anti-Semitism is action for a strong and stable democracy based on equal

rights, a democracy which does not exclude but, rather, integrates, a democracy which does not discriminate but, rather, prevents discrimination from even developing. Prevention means recalling rather than discarding German history.

On 6 June 2003 the German Bundestag unanimously ratified the contract between the Federal Government and the Central Council of Jews in Germany. Paul Spiegel, President of the Central Council, spoke of a historic event, for the Federal Government was thereby not only recognizing but also fostering an active Jewish culture in Germany.

The Federal Government's strategy on fighting anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism is based on four pillars:

The first pillar is a long-term human rights policy, as a cross-cutting task in all fields of national and international policy. Among other things, this goal is served by the establishment of the independent German Institute for Human Rights which is to function not only as a documentation and information centre but, in addition, to actively provide consultancy services on policy. Since 1998, the Bundestag has had its own Human Rights Committee, whose terms of reference encompass both foreign and domestic policy. The creation of my office of Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid underlines our commitment.

In the second pillar, the Federal Government is working closely together with civil society with a view to strengthening and anchoring the idea of human rights in society as a whole. Examples of this are the Alliance for Democracy and Tolerance, the Forum against Racism, in which 80 NGOs are cooperating with 80 state agencies, and special programmes run by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, such as XENOS, ENTIMON and CIVITAS. In recommendations and agreements, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder has stressed on many occasions that teaching young people about human rights is a key task for schools.

The Federal Government considers the third pillar to be support for the integration of foreigners so that immigrants and Germans can live together in peace. The new Nationality Act and the reintroduction of the Immigration Act into the legislative procedure have served this end. In addition, the adoption of an anti-discrimination act is imminent.

In the fourth pillar, the Federal Government is implementing measures aimed at prosecuting criminals and their milieu: the main focus is on prosecuting and preventing right-wing extremist offences on the Internet, as well as fighting organized right-wing extremism. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution closely monitors the development of anti-Semitism in all its forms. As well as keeping registers and regularly updating statistics, the Federal Office publishes a wide-ranging report on the protection of the constitution every year.

The German penal code offers a comprehensive range of legal instruments on the prosecution of hate crimes for the fight against anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism: Section 130 concerns the crime of agitation of the people. Under this Section, "whoever publicly or in a meeting approves of, denies or renders harmless an act committed under National Socialism of the type indicated in Section 6 (1) of the Code of Crimes against International Law, in a manner which is liable to disturb the public peace" may be sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. Section 86 prohibits propaganda, the contents of which are intended to "further the aims of a former National Socialist organization." Further provisions deal specifically with the use of symbols of unconstitutional organizations, the formation of organizations classified as criminal and terrorist, instructional guidance to commit crime, representation of violence, defamation of the memory of deceased persons or insult (Sections 86a, 129b, 130a, 131, 189 and 185 ff).

Both Federal and Land police forces are implementing a host of projects intended to illustrate to police officers not only theoretically but also practically the link between the human rights culture and racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

I regard the capacity and willingness to engage in dialogue, as well as vociferous intervention, as the central task of politicians and civil society which, as Bartozcewski has just stated, must be courageous. We must not remain silent; in particular, our own shortcomings must not be ignored or concealed. Our eyes, ears and mouths must not be closed. We do not want to live in a country in which Jews are afraid to go to the synagogue, in which cemeteries are desecrated and in which anti-Semitic remarks are permissible under the guise of freedom of expression. We want to live in a society in which multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism is regarded as a valuable asset and in which Jews and non-Jews live together in harmony. That is what we are fighting for.

"Human dignity shall be inviolable!"

"Ein lifgo`a be`kawod ha`adam".