



Remarks on the 20th Anniversary of the Elie Wiesel Commission
Speaker Nancy Pelosi Caucus Room
Cannon House Office Building
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Distinguished Ambassador, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Under former President Ion Iliescu, Romania asked Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Wiesel to chair the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania in 2003, understanding full well that with Wiesel as chairman, the Romanian government would not be in a position to contest its findings and Wiesel could not be pressured to submit a report that would compromise the truth.

They also named Dr. Radu Ioanid, a distinguished historian of the Holocaust in Romania, then working at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum—and currently Romania’s Ambassador to Israel—as its Vice Chairman, also knowing full well that he had the historical competence to produce a report that would withstand all scrutiny. Dr. Paul Shapiro and Dan Mariachin, who join me on this panel, the President named Dr. Jean Ancel, then Israel’s preeminent historian of Romania during the Holocaust, and the late Professor Randolph Brahm, were also named to the Commission. Brahm was the preeminent historian of this regime and was not reticent to tangle with the Hungarians as they attempted to rewrite their history of the Holocaust—casting all blame on the Germans and cleansing the Hungarians of all major responsibility. Other prominent historians and public figures inside and outside Romania were also part of the Commission, and its report was a model of historical integrity and scholarship. It was written to withstand all scrutiny and it did.

Its conclusions were stark: Between 280,000 and 380,000 Jews were murdered or died under Romanian supervision and as a result of the deliberate policies of Romanian civilian and military authorities. Over 11,000 Romani were also murdered.

As a result, Romania undertook the important task of creating a museum to tell the story of Romanian Jewry, with a significant emphasis on the Holocaust in Romania. Subsequent Presidents endorsed the project, the Parliament approved it, funding was forthcoming from Germany, the EU, and the Romanian government itself. A site was chosen, tenders were issued, an international competition ensued --- my colleagues and I were privileged to have been chosen to design the exhibition -- an appropriate name was chosen as the sponsoring institution—The Elie Wiesel Institute—and the project seemed well on its way.

So Romania has a foundational history that can withstand all criticism upon which to build not only the Museum but also its own future.

Permit me to address antisemitism in a manner that the distinguished panelists have not yet.

How are we to consider the dramatic rise in antisemitism today?



There is a consensus among all Jews that antisemitism is on the rise and most measurement tools, most specifically the number of antisemitic incidents and recent murders, reinforce that perception. Incidents of antisemitism *are* on the rise – all this was true before October 7th. Now after the October 7th pogroms and the War, it is even more true.

Factors that Lead to the Rise in Antisemitism:

We learn from history that antisemitism varies according to *source*. It can be racial, religious, nationalist, social, or economic, political, and racial—as in Nazi antisemitism.

Antisemitism varies according to *level of preoccupation*, how high a priority is it to the antisemites? Is it the first hatred, or merely one of many? How obsessed are they with the Jews? Does another obsession rank higher? For the Nazis, Jews were the primary targets of their animus. Traditionally in the United States, Jews have been one of the hated groups, but other groups were hated more—sometimes much more. It is of dubious consolation, but in this case, it is better not to win that competition. Hitler had a seamless record of antisemitism from his early speeches to his last will and testament. There are great perils in coming in winning this contest.

Antisemitism varies according to *goal*. For religiously motivated antisemitism, the goal is conversion. For political antisemitism, the diminishment of Jewish power can be the goal— "Jews will not replace us" was chanted in Charlottesville and in Warsaw. Historically, in the more extreme cases, the goal of political antisemitism was expulsion. For social antisemitism, isolation or marginalization can be the goal. For Nazi racial antisemitism, annihilation—what the Nazis termed extermination—became the ultimate goal of the Final Solution. To use Daniel Goldhagen's terms, *eliminationist* antisemitism gave way to *exterminationist* antisemitism.

Antisemitism varies according to how *endangered* a society feels. And America feels deeply endangered. Jews throughout the world feel even more endangered.

There is a general rule: the more stable a society, the more secure its Jews are.

And Jews are a canary in the mine: the canary feels the deprivation of oxygen *before* the miners are endangered and cannot breathe. So if the Jews are in trouble, the society is in trouble.

How Contemporary Antisemitism Differs:

Let us add three additional factors to this combustible mix. First: Today, the expression of *all* hatred is permissible, including Jew-hatred/antisemitism. If you feel hate, you feel empowered to express it and take pride in the authenticity of its expression. For a period after the Holocaust, antisemites were less willing to voice their hatred lest they be associated with the image of the camps and the symbols of Nazism. Now they flaunt it. Racists, too, spoke in muted tones. Now they hate more openly, more conspicuously, more proudly. Dog whistles do not



suffice, only open racism will do. It is not only the presence of hatred that is important, but also the volume at which it is expressed.

Secondly, the Internet empowers an avalanche of vitriol and provides the opportunity for anonymous expression, giving it a megaphone to spread hatred of ethnic minorities and classes. The voices of all haters are reinforced in their views by the communities they form, which are multiplied by a Malthusian-like progression. This has particularly affected journalists and other writers who, immediately after publishing their work, are subjected to hatred and death threats online and in their emails, giving individuals as much power as “institutions.” Their offices have also been targeted by bomb threats and actual violence.

Furthermore, the hater or the loner is no longer isolated but a member of a community. Social media creates community out of hitherto isolated individuals, reenforces and supports their hatred. They no longer feel alone but are joined in a mutually supportive global community. The tirade of a lone killer in New Zealand reverberates around the world.

And conspiracy theories abound, alternate truths in a fact-free universe. Today some deny what happened on October 7th; other accuse the Israelis of killing their own.

Once perceived as the cure for antisemitism or at least the Jews’ insurance policy, we know now that Israel can add fuel to the flames of hatred. *On the Moslem front, there is some good news, if the strategic alliance between Israel and Sunni Muslims endures over time, it will diminish Muslim antisemitism.* As Arab nations establish diplomatic relations with Israel, it will be more difficult to portray Israel and the Jews as the source of all evil. That may be the very reason that Hamas attacked Israel on October 7th.

We must recall also that these nations are entering into relations with Israel not because they love Jews or have great affection for Israel but because it is their self-interest to have a powerful ally when they face up to the Shiites and also because of Israel’s technological prowess. Self-interest is likely to be more enduring than affection.

In Western Europe, the issue of antisemitism varies country by country. In Germany, under Angela Merkel, whose 16 years as Chancellor just came to an end and her successor, German leadership has been strongly against antisemitism and most particularly against the Nazi forces. (It is not quite accurate to call the German right *neo*-Nazis.) Merkel tried to protect and defend German Jews against violence, even as antisemitic violence increased from the right *and* the left. When the President of the German Jewish community suggested that Jews not appear in public with kippot, some 3,000 German non-Jews put on kippot in solidarity with Jews living in Germany. When the synagogue in Halle was attacked on Yom Kippur, Chancellor Merkel stood outside a Berlin synagogue at *Neilah* in a demonstration against such violence.



In Britain, the anti-Israel views of the former head of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, propelled antisemitism in his country, an antisemitism of the left and of the Muslim population. He and his party were defeated, and he lost his leadership position, even his standing in the party. The Archbishop of Canterbury supported Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis when he took a rare, perhaps unprecedented stance, openly denouncing Labour party antisemitism [Corbyn] on the eve of the last election.

In France, one must distinguish between antisemitism *of* France and antisemitism *in* France. For French society that embraces the values of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, Jews are an accepted part of French society, and one is accustomed to working alongside secularists, Muslims, Roman Catholics and Jews. But a segment of the population in France has not embraced those values and tensions in the Middle East or French criticism of Israeli policies, especially in times of war, is regarded as license to attack Jews next door. Still, in the aftermath of the Hyper Kasher killings, the President of France led a demonstration against antisemitism and said that “France without its Jews, is not France.”

In Eastern Europe, democratic regimes born in the aftermath of Communism led to a reduction of antisemitism and an embrace of a more comprehensive, more truthful understanding of the Holocaust, while the recent embrace of authoritarian leaders and the return and ardent nationalism has led to a rewriting to Holocaust history. This rewrite of the history of Jews in those lands is threatening to the Jews and their situations there.

And that is why what Romania did under the leadership of President Ion Iliescu is even more important today.

Time will not permit me address what must be done but let me conclude with an admonition to all of us.

Civil society must hold people of decency must speak out and the institutions of society must come together to denounce antisemitism and denounce hatreds that target people for race or religion, gender or sexual orientation. Let us tone down the hatred and reenforce our common humanity and our commitment to human dignity and decency.

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