Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 16.11.2011 www.osw.waw.pl

The report of the governmental committee on anti-Semitism in Germany

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On 9 November the German government submitted to the Bundestag a report prepared by the experts researching anti-Semitism in Germany. The committee was set up at the initiative of the Bundestag in November 2008 and in fact started work nearly one year later. The committee is composed of ten experts and the staff from educational and non-governmental institutions and local authorities from Germany, the UK and Belgium which are committed to combating anti-Semitism, researching the Holocaust, Islam and Judaism. A joint motion calling for the establishment of the committee was submitted by all parliamentary political groups with the exception of the Left Party (which submitted an identical separate motion) immediately after the desecration of Jewish cemeteries in Germany and a series of media publications on the revival of anti-Semitism in Germany in 2008. After two years of work the committee presented the report to the government which handed it to the Bundestag, where a debate will be held at the end of November. In the report the researchers compared a host of sociological studies in order to determine the scope of anti-Semitism and the areas of social realities where anti-Semitism is present. The report's key conclusion is that anti-Semitism is deeply rooted and widespread in German society; however, the force of the phenomenon has significantly diminished since the beginning of the first decade of the new century.

Commentary

- The authors of the report made the reservation that by using quantity methods they were not able to establish accurately to what extent anti-Semitic prejudices are widespread in Germany or what significance such beliefs present for society as a whole. Despite this, the experts have drawn several conclusions about the scale of anti-Semitism in Germany. In their opinion, although anti-Semitism is taboo in politics and culture, it is widespread and ingrained in the sphere of so-called daily life. This is manifested by the use of words describing belonging to the Jewish community as insults. According to the experts, it is a common phenomenon in young people and in the world of sport. Right-wing extremist organisations and Islamic immigrant communities have been identified by the report's authors as the groups where anti-Semitism is the strongest.

- The methodology used to elaborate the report may raise doubts. In many parts it compiles sociological research conducted by various research centres which use

different research tools. The conclusions drawn from such compilations include a large margin of error. Reservations may also be made about the report's conclusions regarding the so-called daily anti-Semitism. On the basis of the quality research quoted it is impossible to infer whether the use of the term “Jew” as an insult is a marginal or common practice.

- After having read the report one may have the impression that the very act of setting up the committee was more important than the possible results of its work. The establishment of the expert group was meant to be a strong media statement which would convince public opinion in Germany and abroad that the government and parliament are serious about the issue of anti-Semitism in the country. The intended objective has been achieved – after the decision on the establishment of the committee was made and announced in November 2008, there were fewer publications which might tarnish Germany's image.