

European Parliament And Anti-Semitism

Words, Words, Words...

Dr. Manfred Gerstenfeld

The European Parliament recently voted down the proposed establishment of a special task force on anti-Semitism – this despite the rising number of anti-Semitic incidents in many European countries.

The Parliament's decision means the issue of a special task force dealing with anti-Semitism can only be raised again in 2019, after the next parliamentary elections.

It is important to document what is being said by Jewish leaders and other Jews in the public eye about anti-Semitism in their countries. When the parliamentarians will meet five years hence, they will have this material at their disposal.

One can start with the usually understated comments of British Jews. Journalist Hugo Rifkind recently wrote of his discomfort with being Jew in England today. "Never before have I felt that attitudes toward Jews in Europe – and even, albeit less so, in Britain – could grow far, far worse before a whole swathe of supposedly progressive thought was even prepared to notice." In a conversation with Israel's Channel 2, BBC Television director Danny Cohen said, "I've never felt so uncomfortable being a Jew in the UK as I've felt in the last 12 months. And it's made me think about, you know, is it our long-term home, actually. Because you feel it. I've felt it in a way I've never felt before..."

The only resident chief rabbi of the Netherlands, Binyamin Jacobs, said on a national television program that Jews feel unsafe in the Netherlands and are being threatened and insulted on the streets. He noted that he wonders whether it is safe for him to remain there. He feels, however, that he has to stay – "because the captain is the last one to leave the ship."

David Beesemer is the chairman of Maccabi in the Netherlands. He was quoted as having said: "I am now constantly busy with wondering whether I can offer my children a safe future here. Before the summer of 2014 I did not even think about this." David Serphos, the former director of the Ashkenazi community in Amsterdam, wrote, "I don't dare to trust the authorities after the mayor of The Hague and now even of Amsterdam do not interfere when Jews and Judaism are threatened...."

Often I spoke jocularly with friends about reliable addresses to go into hiding [like in the Second World War] if it would ever be necessary. In recent times I look far more seriously to that very short list."



“In the anti-Israeli protests occurring in France during Israel’s Gaza campaign of 2014, ‘They are not screaming ‘Death to Israelis’ on the streets of Paris. They are screaming ‘Death to Jews’”

In July 2014, after firebombs were thrown at a synagogue in Wuppertal, Germany, Charlotte Knobloch, the former president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany (the national German Jewish umbrella organization) said Jews should, at least for the moment, hide their identity. Otherwise, the risk of an attack would be too great.

Dieter Graumann, her successor, said, “These are the worst times since the Nazi era... On the streets, you hear things like ‘the Jews should be gassed,’ ‘the Jews should be burned’ – we haven’t had that in Germany for decades. Anyone using those slogans isn’t criticizing Israeli politics, it’s just pure hatred against Jews, nothing else...”

In 2012, Stephan Kramer, then the secretary general of the Central Council, said he no longer trusted the Germans. “Only the Jews can save themselves,” he declared, adding that he always carries a gun, which he had to show someone who had harassed him on Yom Kippur in order to frighten him away.

Roger Cukierman, the president of CRIF, the French Jewish umbrella organization, said in reference to the anti-Israeli protests occurring in France during Israel’s Gaza campaign of 2014, “They are not screaming ‘Death to Israelis’ on the streets of Paris. They are screaming ‘Death to Jews.’”

In March 2014, Cukierman’s predecessor, Richard Prasquier, had said, “Today, much more acutely than when I left my position as president of CRIF ten months ago, the question of our lasting presence in France is raised.... Today in the Jewish community, there is hardly a conversation when the subject of leaving [France] is not brought up.”

Moshe Kantor, president of the European Jewish Congress, summed it up: “Normative Jewish life in Europe is unsustainable.” The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, sees the problem of anti-Semitism within a much wider context. At a recent OSCE meeting she said anti-Semitic acts “are not only a threat to the Jewish community, they are a threat to the larger project of European liberalism and pluralism.”

In February 2014, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, wrote to the president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz. Cooper wanted Schulz to take action and deal with the prevalent European anti-Israelism.

Schulz replied, “The European Union, European Parliament, and I, as president of the European Parliament, have condemned unequivocally, on numerous occasions, any kind of speech, statement, or publication inciting hatred or discrimination based on political or religious opinions: racism and anti-Semitism are part of this.”

In this manner Schulz was indicating what the major contribution of the European Parliament would be in the fight against anti-Semitism in the coming five years: words, words and...more words.

About the Author: Dr. Manfred Gerstenfeld is a board member and former chairman of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (2000-2012). He is a recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award (2012) of the Journal for the Study of Anti-Semitism.