

The EU Should Act Against Anti-Semitism

The old proverb is still compelling: if at first you don't succeed, try, try again. It has clearly penetrated the halls of the European Union.

On December 16-17, 2015 the 9th EU- Israel Seminar on Combatting Racism, Xenophobia and Anti-Semitism took place in Brussels. Some 30 representatives from the EU, Israel, and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) discussed combating anti-Semitism, in particular through tackling hate speech online by exchanging experience in the field of technology and finding common solutions for what it called "a very worrying phenomenon."

Everyone will appreciate that the EU Commission supports the fight against racism, prejudice, and intolerance, and that legislation against these should be enforced. That support has been pronounced more frequently since the terrorist attacks on the Jewish community in Toulouse on March 11, 2012; the attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels on May 24, 2014; the massacre in the kosher supermarket in Paris on January 7, 2015; and the attack on the Copenhagen synagogue on February 14, 2015.

However, the crucial need is for results as well as discussion. One tires of the assertion that the way that Jews are treated is a kind of litmus test of civilization. One wonders what agreements or common solutions were formulated in the previous eight EU seminars. Once again, the EU, this time in the person of EU Commissioner Vera Jourova, is "extremely concerned" about the rise of anti-Semitism and a general increase of hate-based violence.

That concern has long been registered. The FRA survey of 2013

noted that 50 percent of European Jews saw a significant increase of anti-Semitism in the last five years, and 75 percent felt that online anti-Semitism is widespread. The need for law enforcement and courts in Europe to act and prosecute anti-Semitic behavior and utterances has long been known. For too long Europe has neglected prevention of and punishment of attacks against synagogues, desecration of Jewish cemeteries, and physical assaults against Jews.

Yet the EU finds it still needs to gather as much information as possible. Like the corrupt police chief in *Casablanca*, it is shocked by the fact that anti-Semitism, which it thought was a phenomenon of the past, is on the rise.

In Brussels in October 2015, 60 organizations took part in the well-meaning EU Colloquium on Fundamental Rights to look for the "underlying reasons" for the increase of anti-Semitic, and also anti-Muslim, incidents in Europe. The agenda of the Colloquium appears vast. It looked at the role of the EU and international institutions, member states, local authorities, civil society, community and religious leaders, the media, and educational institutions in addressing the problem.

It is salutary that the EU has now acknowledged that hate speech is now widely propagated on the internet and recognizes the need to solve this in various ways including a civic education program.

The EU also understands there is now an interrelation between anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli attitudes, with barely a real distinction between the two in spite of protestations to the contrary.

What should the EU be doing in practical fashion? There are a variety of meaningful rejoinders against discrimination against Jews of which it should take note. A few recent activities can be helpful for Brussels officials.

One recent event in December 2015 is the action of Travis

Allen, the assemblyman in California, who has introduced a bill into the California legislature. The bill would direct California retirement systems to divest from any investments they have in companies that engage in political or economic discrimination against Israel. Allen's bill follows the pattern of an act in Illinois that barred its pension funds being invested in companies that boycott Israel.

The EU might call on universities and educational institutions in Europe to refrain from passing motions to boycott or refrain from collaboration with Israeli academic institutions. It might go farther and stop funding and grants to those institutions that willingly or by lack of action are injecting hatred and racism and political and ideological positions into the academic world.

The London School of Economics, in particular, has been a scene in October and November 2015 of flagrant bigotry in a number of instances. One was an exhibition of photographs by pro-Palestinian students that glorified Palestinian terrorism against Israeli civilians. It was a celebration of violence and perpetrators of violence. A second was an anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish blog post by an Australian Notre Dame University academic, Sandra Nasr, posted on the LSE website, that contained slurs including labeling Zionism as apartheid and accused Israel of treating Palestinians as subhuman. Nasr also wrote that Israel rests on notions of separateness, superiority, and entitlement. After protests, LSE removed the blog.

The third LSE incident was a joint meeting in January 2015 of the Palestine Society and Feminist Society, ironically on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, at which Israelis were labeled rapists of Palestinian women. The societies applauded those, especially women, who killed Israelis and who hijacked planes. The meeting was chaired by a research fellow at LSE's Middle East Center.

It is incumbent on the EU to play a role in the detection and reporting of extreme anti-Semitic activities on European campuses.

The EU should make known to European countries that they should not emulate the decisions of book fairs in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The December 2015 Jeddah International Book Fair in Saudi Arabia featured anti-Semitic books by authors such as the American David Duke. In the same month, the Doha International Book Fair in Qatar also sold books such as the anti-Semitic Jewish Encyclopedia.

The EU should not tolerate discrimination by transport carriers, European or otherwise. It had the opportunity to make this known as a result of Kuwait Airways canceling its service between London and New York in order to avoid carrying Jewish passengers. Kuwait law forbids doing business with Israel or Israelis, and this has apparently spread to include all Jews. The EU might consider its attitude towards Kuwait.

The EU should make clear that Jews and citizens of Israel are included in any list of victims of terror. The president of the British National Union of Students, Megan Dunn, was obliged to apologize for her remarks in December 2015 when she listed areas hit by recent terrorist attacks. She named a number of places, including Palestine, where people had been murdered by "paramilitary organizations." She omitted Israel.

The EU should cancel its discriminatory rules on labeling goods from Israeli settlements. Already, the parliament in the Czech Republic has joined Hungary in calling for its government to refuse to abide by these rules, declaring that they are motivated by hostile political attitude towards the State of Israel.

The EU, like the rest of the world, should take effective action, not merely keep discussing the existence and increase in anti-Semitism. One does not need "more research" on the

issue. All reasonable people with the EU and elsewhere can agree that action to deal with the unending hatred of Jews is now essential.

First published in the