

“ANTICIPATING AND PREVENTING DEADLY ATTACKS ON EUROPEAN JEWISH COMMUNITIES.”

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The presence of Jews in Belgium can be traced from the 1st century A.C. and is confirmed during the 13th century. The religious institutions were organized under French authority and Napoleon created the Consistory organizing the cult before the establishment of the Kingdom of Belgium.

With two main locations, the Antwerp community is for its majority composed by orthodox movements (comparable to the communities established in New York or in Israel) while Brussels is more secular with vivid institutions and approximately 20,000 individuals in a city of 1,1 million.

Allow me to describe the current atmosphere among belgian jews: Community members are nowadays used to see Police, guards, military in front of jewish buildings and schools. It has been so for decades and I would say that although it is not a normal situation for a well integrated community, it is a relief to know that the risks on the Jewish community are assessed and taken seriously, in the limits of the governments capacities.

Yet the situation is worrying as the statistics compiled by the NGO Antisemitisme.be (data are also used by Study centers and universities, International institutions (OSCE), Daily contacts with the Interfederal Center for Equal Opportunities) show the following:

The level of hatred has not been so high since 1945 (raise of 70% in 2014 compared to 2016):

- Anti-Semitic discourse spreads in an unprecedented extent, especially in internet.
- A new phenomenon of discrimination is targeting the Jewish individuals
- and violence has reached an unprecedented level of horror as were killed in the terrorist attack of the Brussels Jewish Museum (May 24 2014)
- A major survey among Flemish teenagers has indicated that anti-Semitism is seven times more prevalent among Muslim youths than in non-Muslim teenagers(Mark Elchardus and Johan Put, Jong in Brussel. Bevindingen uit de JOP-monitor, Acco, Leuven, 2011).
- In the last two years, the press denounced anti-semitic incidents in public schools, including with teachers making anti-semitics problems. As a consequence, for several years, jews are leaving public schools for jewish schools which increases the distance between jews and non-jews in what should remain a community where diversity is promoted.
- Jewish life in Europe is part of its diversity. As we also know from the Fundamental Rights Agency Survey, an increasing number of Jews feel less and less comfortable attending Jewish events and institutions.

In such a situation, and I will express a personal opinion on this matter, the propagation of radical Islam is the symptom of the failure in education specifically within the younger generation of the muslim community.

Many causes and effects can be described. But to stay focused on our purpose, it also results in mistrust and suspicion in the relationship existing between the community and the police, intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Having the opportunity to observe the work and expertise of John Farmer and Paul Goldenberg, the Institute for Emergency Preparedness and Homeland Security, the Faith-Based Communities Security Program at Rutgers University and their international partners, I am convinced that sharing best practices in the implementation of the "See something Say something strategy" is of crucial importance.

Such a strategy should be implemented at the level of each community as at the level of the broader community.

The communication channels established between communities and the authorities, government and law enforcement agencies would participate in the establishment of a more balanced society based on respect and mutual understanding.

Sharing concern about what is happening in the various communities is a fundamental step which has to be followed by action. Creating the tools to communicate amongst communities with the government will be considerably facilitated by the "See something Say something strategy".

The collaboration with Law enforcement agencies has to be based on trust and confidence, in respect of international laws and rules protecting individual freedom, civil liberties and privacy.

Communication channels, types of intelligence collected by each actor must be clearly defined. The protocols existing in the US, the UK and France should be a reference for local police and national law enforcement agencies empowering local communities.

The situation of local communities and the relationship with the authorities should be regularly assessed.

Taking the exemple of Brussels after the attack on the Jewish Museum, emergency planning and communication with local police have worked properly. Lessons have now to be taken in order to structure the coordination.

Establishing a Memorandum of Understanding would now be an important step and should be based on what is already implemented in neighboring countries like France.

At this stage, communal leadership is crucial as operational and symbolic choices have to be made.

Considering the risks assessing the threats and knowing that public resources are limited (especially in the days following the terrorist attacks that occurred in Brussels on March 22), what decisions should be taken about the activities planned?

In this case, security challenges the constitutional principle of freedom of religion.

Who should take responsibility?

Confidence and collaboration should guide community leadership, law enforcement agencies and political leaders in the decision making process.

Fortunately enough, political statements have also been of great determination in condemning Antisemitism and violence. The Belgian Government has provided public funding to improve the physical protection of buildings used by the Jewish community.

As a conclusion, I would underline the necessity of establishing the terms of reference that European governments should use. International organizations and agencies are a key player in that matter.

I personally believe that the OSCE could develop a platform to exchange good practices and confront the approaches and strategies in fighting an external threat with domestic impact and support.

I would finally formulate the following recommendations:

- Implement "If you see something, Say Something" with Jewish Communities as pilots
- Empower Jewish Communities by establishing a MoU defining the collaboration between law enforcement agencies and Jewish communities
- Never banalize Antisemitism

Annex: List of Antisemitic terrorist attacks in Belgium:

- In 1980, grenades were launched in Antwerp on a group of Jewish children, one is killed.
- On 20 October 1981 a car bomb outside a synagogue in Antwerp killing three and sixty wounded.
- In 1982, a gunman opened fire at the entrance to the Great Synagogue of Brussels and injured four people.
- In 1989, Dr. Joseph Wybran, chairman of the Jewish Organizations Coordinating Committee of Belgium is assassinated.
- Several places of worship in Brussels, Antwerp and Charleroi are attacked in 2002.
- In June 2003, a person tries to blow the synagogue in Charleroi.
- May 24, 2014, individual broke into the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels and killed two tourists, volunteer and an employee.

All Antisemitic incident is officially recorded by www.Antisemitisme.be

Jonathan Biermann was born on January 20, 1979. He is a lawyer at the Bar of Brussels and a Member of the City Council (2006) and an Alderman (2012) in the Municipality of Uccle (Brussels).

He was the Political Adviser to the President of the Belgian Senate, the Development Minister, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, responsible for the politico-military issues, the fight against intolerance as well as anti-semitism.

During his Law Degree at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, he was Chairman of a students association “Cercle du Libre Examen” and then Adviser to the Rector for cultural Affairs. Since July 2015, Jonathan is the President of the Alumni of the University.

He is born and raised in Brussels, in a family that is very involved in the Jewish community. After being involved in various cultural organizations, he was appointed to establish the Crisis plan of the Jewish community. He is the executive director of the crisis cell and was in charge at the time of the attack on the Jewish Museum on May 24th 2014.