

The fact that a rise in anti-Semitic activities is clearly observable in most of the EU Member States since the beginning of the so-called al-Aqsa Intifada, which increased in frequency and the intensity of their violence parallel to the escalation in the Middle East conflict in April/May 2002, points to a connection between events in the Middle East with criticism of Israel's politics on the one hand and mobilisation of anti-Semitism on the other.

While it is certainly correct to view anti-Semitism as part of racism, at the same time it possesses very specific traits. Jews in the European Union are well integrated socially, economically and culturally. Thus, the typical motives of xenophobia are hardly of consequence for the Jews. Instead, Jews are imagined to be a national and international influential group who allegedly exert a bad influence on or even steer politics, the economy and the media, which is a way of expressing the old anti-Semitic prejudice of hidden Jewish power.

Forms of anti-Semitic Prejudices:

The range of anti-Semitic motives stretches from racist to conspiratorial-oriented and religious prejudices; but anti-Zionist notions, often coupled with anti-American patterns, were also activated. The dominating motive of contemporary anti-Semitism is still that of a Jewish world conspiracy. This basic assumption is applied to explain very different phenomena. Here the Holocaust denial assumes a central role in European right-wing extremism. At this point, extreme right-wing propaganda becomes employable ideologically for radical Islamist groups in their struggle against Israel, for the victim status and Israel's right to exist are challenged by the "Auschwitz lie". Here a learning process has taken place in which "revisionist" thought, that was propagated very early and very prominently by French intellectuals (lastly by Roger Garaudy), was adopted by some people in the Arab world. Via Arab-language media in Europe these notions reach in turn a small section of the Muslim population in European countries. Such stereotypes are also spread by the World Wide Web.

The Internet is in almost all EU Member countries an important medium for anti-Semitic propaganda, precisely because it is suited to the international dissemination of anti-Semitism due to the difficulty in identifying the perpetrators. The World Wide Web reflects a development observable since 2000, namely the networking of the extreme right scene via links with sections of the radical Islamist spectrum, some sites from anti-globalisation campaigners, from the anti-American far left, and also from some radical religious groups for example the Italian-English Site "Holywar" which combines anti-Judaistic and traditional anti-Semitic with anti-Zionist stereotypes.

Since the end of the 1990s there has been a dramatic increase in the number of homepages present on the web from far-right groups and parties, which quite often also have ties to radical Islamic fundamentalists. Such groups create ideological ties, in particular by utilising the denial

of the Holocaust as a component of anti-Semitic agitation, and build up a network. Revisionism is spread by European organisations such as the Belgian “Vrij historisch Onderzoek” (vho), the Swedish “Radio Islam”, the French “L’Association des Anciens Amateurs de Récits de Guerres et d’Holocaustes” (AAARGH), the Danish site “Patriot” or numerous homepages in German that are hosted in various countries. These are in turn linked to the entire international scene, i.e. the respective leading revisionist homepages in America, Australia and Canada are then accessible.

A current example of anti-Semitic conspiratorial thoughts, which can be observed also most prominently on the World Wide Web, is offered in connection with the attacks of the 11th of September 2001. Some Arab newspapers in Jordan, Egypt and Syria, but also in the London and Saudi-Arabian editions of Al-Hayat presented these terrorist attacks as an action initiated by the Israeli secret service or even the Israeli government itself, who were seeking to prevent the establishment of closer ties between the US and the Arab world so as to gain a free hand for their aggressive plans against the Palestinians. This rumour has also spread through Europe, where it found great resonance above all in Greece.

The fact that the Middle East conflict is taking place in the Holy Land of the Christians has led in various countries to a revitalisation of anti-Judaist motives by church leaders and confessional as well as some liberal newspapers. The liberal Italian daily La Stampa, for example, depicted a baby Jesus looking up from the manger at an Israeli tank, saying, “Don’t tell me they want to kill me again.” And in Edinburgh, an Episcopalian clergyman was forced to defend a mural showing a crucified Jesus flanked by Roman soldiers - and modern-day Israeli troops. This takes the form of current events (the conflict over the Church of Nativity, children and youths as the victims of military action) being brought into connection with events in the New Testament which historically have clear anti-Jewish connotations (Massacre of the Innocents, crucifixion of Christ). Such phenomena are particularly virulent in Italy, but are also not absent in Protestant countries like Denmark or the United Kingdom.

Looking at the perpetrators identified or at least identifiable with some certainty, it can be said that the anti-Semitic incidents since the radicalisation of the Middle East conflict were committed above all by right-wing extremists and radical Islamists or young Muslims; but also that anti-Semitic statements came from the pro-Palestinian left as well as politicians and citizens from the political mainstream.

During a wave of anti-Semitism like the one we could observe in April and May 2002, in which a heated public debate took place on Israeli politics and the boundary between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism, persons become motivated to voice their latent anti-Semitic attitudes (mostly in the form of telephone calls and insulting letters) who are not politically active and do not belong to one of the ideological camps sketched above. Opinion polls prove that in some European countries a more or less large percentage of the population harbours anti-Semitic

attitudes and views, but that these usually remain latent and can be mobilised in circumstances like the heated debate on the Middle East conflict.

There are a number of EU Member States, namely Ireland and Luxembourg, where anti-Semitic incidents in general seldom occur and were hardly evident since the radicalisation of the Middle East conflict. At most threatening letters were sent to the Israeli consulate or to local Jews. The same applies to Portugal and Finland. At the other end of the scale stand a series of countries in which there was a massive wave of anti-Semitic incidents. Here, France assumes the top position, with Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK in second place. These countries witnessed numerous physical attacks and insults directed against Jews and vandalism of Jewish institutions (synagogues, shops, cemeteries). In these countries the violent attacks on Jews and/or synagogues were reported to be committed often by members of the Muslim-Arab minority, frequently youths. The observers agree that these are disaffected young men who themselves are frequently targets of racist attacks, i.e. here the social problems of these migrant minorities are obviously an essential factor for their propensity to violence and susceptibility to anti-Semitism. Far fewer anti-Semitic attacks committed by members of this group were evident in countries like Sweden and Denmark, where attacks – similarly to the Netherlands – were only seldom evident in the 1990s given general populations in which, according to polls, anti-Semitic attitudes are not widespread.

Other countries show a very specific expression of anti-Semitism. – In Greece we find a series of cemetery and memorial desecrations, which point to a far-right background. Anti-Semitic/anti-Zionist statements and sentiments were found in the mass media and were also expressed by some politicians and opinion leaders. Here the Greek foreign policy position perhaps plays a role; since the Second World War Greece has opposed Israel because of its alliance with Turkey. Spain offered a mixed picture where the traditional strong presence of neo-Nazi groups was evident alongside a series of attacks which indicate an Islamist background. The recently published book “El Lobby Judío” by the Colombian-born journalist Alfonso Torres, which plays into some of the very stereotypes it seeks to deflate, comes at a time when anti-Jewish tendencies in Spain are discovered to be on a very high level. An ADL survey, released in October 2002, found out that 34% of Spanish respondents held anti-Semitic views, one of the highest percentages in Europe.

In Germany, where a large number of anti-Semitic offences have been registered annually since the 1990s, Anti-Semitism manifested itself less in a higher number of attacks but more in the form of a flood of anti-Semitic letters to the Jewish Communities and prominent Jews sent by German citizens who by no means all belong politically to the far-right. This was in part a reaction to a hefty political controversy.

Italy showed a certain similarity with Germany; although no physical attacks were evident, there were threatening telephone calls, insulting letters, slogans and graffiti, whereby the perpetrators did not come from the Muslim population. However, particularly pronounced in Italy is a pro-Palestinian mobilisation within left-wing parties, organisations and newspapers, which in connection with public rallies partially took an anti-Semitic turn. In contrast to other countries, there is rather in Italy a revival of anti-Judaist topoi coupled with traditional anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist stereotypes rooted in the left. This religiously connotated anti-Semitism stems above all from fundamentalist Catholic circles (the so-called “integrationists”); it became particularly visible during the events which took place at the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem. Even in some of the politically moderate press there are scattered references to the murder of Christ, showing that, after decades of absence, such stereotypes are also being revived in secular circles.

In Italy, France, Spain and Sweden sections of the political left and Muslim groups unified to stage pro-Palestinian demonstrations. At some of these demonstrations anti-Semitic slogans and placards were to be seen and heard and some even resulted in attacks upon Jews or Jewish institutions. A similar trend was observable in the Netherlands, here though without any great participation from the political left. In Finland however pro-Palestinian demonstrations passed without any anti-Semitic incidents. Mainly in Germany, but also in a weaker form in Austria, public political discourse was dominated in contrast by a debate on the link between Israeli policy in the Middle East conflict and anti-Semitism, a debate in which the cultural and political elite were involved, whereas the mobilisation of the extreme left remained low-key. In Germany the critical reporting of the media was also a topic for controversy, as it was also in the United Kingdom, where left-liberal papers (The Guardian and The Independent) were heavily criticised by Jewish representatives. In other countries there was obviously no heated public discussion on the theme criticism of Israel/anti-Semitism, such as in Luxembourg, Ireland, Portugal, Denmark and Finland.

In summary it can be said that the threatening nature of the situation, in particular for the Jewish communities, arose because in most of the monitored countries the increasing number of anti-Semitic attacks, committed frequently by young Arabs/Muslims but also in part by far-right extremists, was accompanied by a sharp criticism of Israeli politics across the entire political spectrum, a criticism that in some cases employed anti-Semitic stereotypes. This parallel character arose out of the joint reference to the escalating situation in the Middle East; both phenomena, the attacks and the public discussion, have significantly receded since June 2002. In the following months the sometimes heated discussions about the Middle East conflict in the public and the media died down and the number of the incidents decreased. In countries like Denmark, Greece, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Austria, Portugal and Finland there are only a few or no incidents known for the second half of the year. In some States like Belgium, France and Sweden the number of anti-Semitic incidents, including violent attacks and

threatening phone calls, increased again in September and October, but it does not compare to the situation during the first half of the year.

It is to be recommended that steps for an improved recording and monitoring of anti-Semitic incidents as well as regulations for combating them are quickly implemented. Given the connection between the Middle East conflict and the wave of anti-Semitic incidents, such incidents could once again break out if there is a renewed escalation, for example if military action is taken against Iraq. Experience shows that the political willingness to take action in response to such waves is only of short duration and thus fails to recognise that here long-term perspectives must be developed and financed.