

Antisemitism. Germany 2013.

Germany is the only European country with a growing Jewish population. The official Jewish establishment is made of 108 Jewish congregations with a total of about 118,000 members. But the number of unaffiliated Jewish citizens in Germany, the "enlarged Jewish population" is given with 250.000.

According to a government sponsored study, 20% of Germans harbor antisemitic attitudes. This does not come as a surprise and has been a known fact for decades. However this time, the German Bundestag got involved and signaled the government's recognition of antisemitism and approved in June 2013 a resolution vowing to combat antisemitism and support Jewish life in Germany. (The resolution also emphasized the special relationship between Germany and Israel and pointed out that the solidarity with Israel is an essential point in German politics). The official findings for the year 2013 showed that while the number of overall antisemitic crimes decreased from 865 (or 1065) in 2012 to 788, violence against Jews was on the rise, notably from 27 violent incidents in 2012 to 32 in 2013. It must be mentioned that the number of unreported cases is much higher and that even those that are reported are not always classified by the police authorities as hate crimes, motivated by antisemitism.

The vast majority of the officially registered crimes against Jews and Jewish institutions were carried out by people with an extreme right-wing background, i.e. about 753 cases, among them 29 violent incidents.

Notwithstanding the decrease in the overall numbers, the perceptions of Jews in Germany are one of discomfort and often fear. (see FRA report in

General Analysis). The reason seems to lie in the fact that antisemitic - insults, -name-calling and -defamation do no longer belong exclusively to a fringe cultural pattern, but have entered the mainstream discourse, becoming a daily phenomenon. To understand the seriousness of the phenomenon one has to see these developments on the background and in the context of an ever widening anti-Israel/ anti-Zionist public consensus (see general analysis). Reinforced was the public discourse on antisemitism - and/or antisemitic public discourse – by the continuing debates on the anti-Israel poem of Guenther Grass as well as the debates on circumcision and ritual slaughter, the schechita (see general analysis of 2012 and 2013) .

Although antisemitic tendencies can be found amongst all groups, there are different causalities at work. The findings of a study by the University of Bielefeld, based on evidence gathered over 10 years, showed that while for young Germans without immigrant background, the German past especially the Holocaust plays an important role in their attitudes towards Jews , Muslim youngsters mention the Middle East conflict as a reason of their hatred to Jews and immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe, express more traditional types of antisemitic attitudes.

It might not be surprising to learn that 63% of those polled in the FRA report on Jewish perception on antisemitism, avoid wearing, carrying or displaying anything that might suggest they are Jews and 25% said they have considered emigrating in the last five years because of a feeling of insecurity. This feeling is reflected in that fact that, like in most Western European countries, synagogues, community centers, and Jewish schools must be placed under police protection. (see previous report)

On 9 October 2013, Petra Pau, vice-president of the German Bundestag and member of the Die Linke, released a statement according to which the Federal Government announced that between 2008 and 2012, 82 assaults on synagogues were registered throughout Germany. The findings of the Kantor Center Database, have been showing for years that attacks and desecrations of Jewish sites i.e. synagogues, cemeteries and Holocaust memorials (including Stolpersteine) are being reported on a weekly basis.

According to Prof. Stefanie Springorum who directs the Center for Research on Antisemitism at the Technical University of Berlin,

antisemitism is deeply rooted in German society and Berlin Rabbi Daniel Alter, the envoy for antisemitism of the Berlin community, (who was himself victim of a violent antisemitic attack in August 2012), added that "you can find it [anti-Semitism] at all levels of society". A similar idea was expressed by the Bamberg Archbishop Ludwig Schick who warned of "an unremarkable everyday antisemitism which is a latent danger, even if it does not necessarily lead to violence. "Who is silent about Jewish jokes "is complicit," said the bishop.

Anti-Jewish attitudes are no longer to be found preeminently far away from the public eye, but are shown "openly, bolder and less hidden." This fact backs one of the results of a study, headed by Prof. Monika Schwarz-Friesel, Technical University of Berlin, of 14.000 antisemitic hate messages - letters and emails - addressed to the Israeli embassy in Berlin and to Germany's Central Council of Jews, namely that an increasing number of writers do no longer hide behind anonymity.

Friesel's team further concluded, contrary to their assumptions, that 60 percent of the hate messages were sent by educated Germans, including university professors and priests, and that only 3% came from right-wing extremists. There were no significant differences between right-wing extremists' letters and those of the educated mainstream, "the difference is only in the style and the rhetoric, but the ideas are the same."

Most antisemitic incidents are being perpetrated by extreme right-wingers and neo-Nazis, whose potential for using violence has concerned law and order authorities for decades in Germany. These groups are recruiting new members inter alia among the martial art's fans and competitors through methodological infiltration of an increasing number of neo-Nazi members into the free fighting community. The same modus operandi can be observed for the army where neo-Nazis not only recruit potential new members, but also ameliorate their fighting skills and enjoy easy access to weapon training. Three hundred far-right extremists and 50 Islamists were reported serving in the Bundeswehr (German army) according to the German Military Counter Intelligence Service (MAD) – a special branch of the secret services dedicated to protecting the army.

An example of countering internationalized neo-Nazi terror activities can be seen when on 17th July 2013, police and anti-terrorism units raided 11 homes, offices and prison cells in Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, in a joint operation targeting a suspected international neo-Nazi cell. Six neo-Nazis, and accomplices, are suspected of planning bomb attacks to overthrow the German political system. The plot was

named "Werwolf," in memory of the Nazi "Werwolf" plan, a commando force to launch attacks behind enemy lines.

Holocaust memorials, Jewish cemeteries and synagogues continued to be desecrated and vandalized all over Germany. At the same time however outrage and sharp criticism from the population and political establishment followed these acts of violent anti-Semitic hatred. Often, like after the March 9th event when people unknown desecrated the memorial stones (Stolpersteine) in Friedenau and Schoeneberg, inhabitants organized a cleansing action in response.

The following exemplify physical and verb assaults on Jews:

On June 1st, 2013, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Gurewitz was attacked in the KOMM shopping center, Offenbach, by a group of young men who pushed him as they yelled "shitty Jew". In a comment published on the German website 'Hagalil.com' in which he describes the incident, Gurewitz says that verbal antisemitic insults directed at him and his sons were an everyday phenomenon in Offenbach.

On March 13th 2013, a transsexual man was verbally attacked with antisemitic and homophobic slurs in Berlin-Schöneberg. According to the report of the 30-year-old Lithuanian, he had been praying quietly in Hebrew in the street when two arab speaking 17 or 18-year-olds called him a "Gay Jewish pig" ("Schwule Judensau"), hustled him on the ground and robbed him.

The publication of two antisemitic cartoons in mainstream papers caused a wave of criticism and a debate on the use of antisemitic stereotypes in caricatures.

On 5 August 2013, the German daily *Stuttgarter Zeitung* published a caricature by "Luff" (Rolf Henn) of Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, showing him poisoning the "dove of the Middle East peace". The caricature prompted many protests by those who considered it to represent an antisemitic stereotype. The caption of the caricature was a famous line of Jewish-Austrian-American satirist Georg Kreisler's song "Taubenvergiften im Park" (Poisoning Pigeons in the Park). The daughter of the late Kreisler (1922-2011) strongly protested that her father's song was used as a caption of an antisemitic cartoon.

On February 21st 2014, the German newspaper „Süddeutsche Zeitung“ (SZ) published a caricature of Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg showing him as an octopus with a big hooked nose trying to control the internet. The drawing was sharply criticised, inter alia by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre (SWC) in Jerusalem, for the use of typical antisemitic stereotypes recalling Nazi imagery. According to the SWC the caricature of Zuckerberg is very similar to a Nazi caricature from 1938 depicting Winston Churchill as an octopus clasping the world. The caricaturist Burkhard Mohr apologised for causing offence and explained he hadn't been aware of the parallels to the antisemitic representation done by the Nazis.

It must be mentioned that hundreds of initiatives are fighting racism and antisemitism all over Germany. Among them also sports' – specifically soccer organizations who do have to counter the phenomenon of antisemitic hooliganism in the stadiums.

Also, on Holocaust Memorial Day January 27 2013, the German Football League, German Football Association and the Nie Wieder (never Again) campaign arranged a range of memorial events honoring Jewish players, coaches and supporter of various German football clubs who were killed in the Holocaust or who had to go into exile during the Nazi years. Memorial events were organized by football clubs in the UK, Italy and Poland as well.