

## Germany 2014 / Sarah Rembiszewski

- If an arson attack on a synagogue is not considered to be antisemitic - after three Palestinians firebombed the synagogue of Wuppertal (29 July 2014), the judge let them off with just arson charges because they intended to 'bring attention to the Gaza conflict', suggesting that it may be kind of legitimate protest,

- if a judge does allow calling somebody "a fiery antisemite" only if he "talks, with conviction, in an antisemitic way and does not condemn the Third Reich and cannot view the period 1933-1945 as separate from the background of history", like Munich regional judge, Petra Grönke-Müller, thus suggesting indirectly that German antisemitism was limited to the Nazi period of 1933-1945 (Trial *Elsässer vs Ditfurth*, October 8, 2014; Munich State Court),

- or if a prosecutor's office dropped investigations into chants heard at an anti-Israel demonstration on grounds that chants such as „death, death Israel“ and "children murderer Israel“ didn't constitute hate speech, since they were directed against a country and not against a specific group of people within Germany<sup>1</sup>, then something is profoundly wrong in the understanding of antisemitic incidents in Germany, and not only there. This lack of knowledge, sensibility or courage to call an assault on a Jew or Jewish institution an antisemitic event, may have dangerous consequences, especially in the context of ever-increasing violence against the Jewish community in Germany, where for the first time the appeal to "Gas the Jews" was openly yelled during anti-Israel demonstrations. Also, in view of the violent climate of Islamist terror in Europe, this seems to be a dramatic development.

In an interview on 22 July 2014 with Carolina Ambrosi in the German weekly *Die Zeit*, Prof. Wolfgang Benz said that, notwithstanding the attacks on Jews and Jewish sites during the Israel Operation in Gaza, antisemitism has not increased in Germany. Benz referred to the statement of Dieter Graumann, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, about antisemitic incidents in Germany during protests against the Gaza War. Graumann warned that "we are currently experiencing, in this country, an explosion of evil and violent hatred of Jews, which shocks and dismays all of us" and called for "clear and loud condemnation" from German political leaders. According to Benz, however, criticism of Israeli policy is not the same as antisemitism and "all scientific findings show that antisemitism is in this country for decades a fairly constant size. Only about five percent of the population has strong resentment that you can refer to them as antisemites".

Due to different perceptions of antisemitism and the dimensions of the phenomenon, and in order to better understand and fight antisemitic manifestations, the German government named a new commission of experts on antisemitism. However the commission was sharply

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<sup>1</sup> It must be mentioned that half a year after violent anti-Israel demonstrations in Essen, German Judge Gauri Sastry convicted 24-year-old Taylan Can for incitement against an ethnic minority. Can was prosecuted for his use of the term "Zionist" as incitement against a minority. Judge Sastry "'Zionist' is the language of anti-Semites, the code for 'Jew.'" <http://www.timesofisrael.com/german-judge-rules-anti-zionism-is-code-for-anti-semitism/>.

criticized for not including Jewish experts, a fact which Julius Schoeps, of the Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies called "a unique scandal", while Anetta Kahane, of the Amadeu Antonio Foundation Against Anti-Semitism, argued that "Nobody would even think of creating a conference on hatred of Islam without Muslims or a round table on the discrimination of women without women."

Officially, 108 Jewish communities in Germany have a total membership of ca 105,000 (to December 2013.) This number does not include another 100,000 non-affiliated citizens of Jewish faith. Most of the 200,000 Jews living in Germany are of eastern-European origin.

Although antisemitic sentiments on the whole did not increase from the already high number of 20% since 1945, antisemitic incidents and manifestations of all kinds, verbal and physical, rose sharply during and after the Operation Protective Edge, in the summer of 2014. Many Jewish citizens report an ever-increasing sense of insecurity, which may be explained in part by the violence they face, the Islamist terror they are threatened with<sup>2</sup> and by the fact that radical anti-Zionism has infiltrated the mainstream discourse, thus becoming "gesellschaftsfähig" – socially acceptable (or accepted). More than one in four respondents in a recent poll equate the Jewish state's treatment of Palestinians with Nazi persecution of Jews during World War Two, according to the findings of the study,<sup>3</sup> "Fragile Center - Hostile Conditions".<sup>4</sup> The proportion of people who approve of xenophobic ideas has sunk from 25 percent to 7.5 and acceptance of antisemitic statements among respondents has also dropped significantly, from 8.6 to 3.2 percent. This positive development is mainly due to "the massive amount of educational work having an effect," according to Andreas Zick, director of studies at the Institute for *Interdisciplinary Conflict and Violence Research* at the University of Bielefeld, adding that "norms are fragile, and there's a strong polarization between clear agreement with - and clear rejection of - statements hostile to particular groups".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> New protocols of security measures by the Berlin police include sending the magazine "Jewish Berlin" in an unmarked envelope. The Berlin Jewish community spokesman Ilan Kiesling explained that, "Despite considerably higher costs, the community's executive board decided to send the community magazine in a neutral envelope, in order to reduce the hostility toward our more than 10,000 members. Many community members were thinking about cancelling their subscription." <http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/German-Jews-hide-Jewish-magazine-for-fear-of-anti-Semitic-attacks-391680>.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.fes-gegen-rechtsextremismus.de/pdf\\_14/FragileMitte-FeindseligeZustaeude.pdf](http://www.fes-gegen-rechtsextremismus.de/pdf_14/FragileMitte-FeindseligeZustaeude.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> According to the new study 18% of Germans think that Jews are responsible for their persecution because of their behavior. The survey was published on Tuesday in Bielefeld, by the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (ICG) at the University of Bielefeld.

15% of respondents believe that Jews have too much influence in Germany. Among respondents over the age of 60, this figure was 23%. More than half of respondents (55 percent) are angry that Germans are still accused of crimes against the Jews. 49 percent are "tired of hearing over and over again on German crimes against the Jews."

The researchers further said that the demonstrations against the war in Gaza last summer "frighteningly revived antisemitism". According to the study 28% "can understand why people do not like the Jews, considering Israel's policy".

Comparative criticism between the Nazis and Israel is also most common: 40% speak of "a war of extermination against the Palestinians" and for 27% "Israeli policy toward the Palestinians is not different from what the Nazis did to the Jews in the Third Reich". The study examined, for the past 12 years, the hatred for

However, the follow-up interviews which were done in September, after Operation Protective Edge, showed noticeably more agreement with negative statements such as, "Jews have too much influence in Germany" and "The Jews bear part of the responsibility for their persecution." The findings further showed that people with a closed right-wing extremist worldview are more likely to resort to violence than previously.

Notwithstanding the outcome of polls and interviews, the reality on the ground, in the streets showed a frightening picture, especially in the second half of the year. The number of incidents sharply increased and so did the violence and brutality of the physical as well as verbal manifestations in Germany. When analyzing the tendencies of antisemitism, one cannot ignore the fact that without an ever-rising atmosphere of legitimization of the radical anti-Zionist narrative and its acceptability in mainstream Europe, such a drastic rise as that seen during the summer months would not have been possible.

During the first 6 months of 2014 the official numbers of antisemitic criminal acts showed a positive tendency, that of decreasing numbers<sup>6</sup>. This tendency was to change in July and continue until the end of the year 2014. On the whole there has been a rise in antisemitic incidents, from 788 in 2013 to 864 (1076 according to yet unpublished numbers)<sup>7</sup> in 2014. This number includes violent attacks, which have decreased, according to the numbers of the German Ministry of Interior, from 32 in 2013 to 25 in 2014.<sup>8</sup> But these decreasing numbers do not realistically convey the exceptionally severe quality of verbal and physical violence facing Jews in Germany, which has considerably increased the concern not only of the Jewish community but also of the law enforcement authorities, who had to intensify security for schools, synagogues and other Jewish sites.

However, these are not the only arenas of antisemitic manifestations.

As has been observed for years, anti-Jewish feelings are ever increasingly "let out" online in the mostly secure surroundings of the cyberspace; according to the findings of Berlin-based linguistics professor Monika Schwarz-Friesel, who observed during the second half of 2014 a "massive flood", an explosion of antisemitic comments on the web, "falling back on old stereotypes," with phrases such as "usurer", "child murderer" and "global conspiracy" are being used again in reference to Jewish people". What's happening at the moment is exceeding everything we have seen in the last few years – both quantitatively and qualitatively," and what you see is the surfacing of a deeply rooted resentment of Jews" the researcher explained.<sup>9</sup>

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certain population groups in Germany. To this end, they researched 500 German. [http://www.fes-gegen-rechtsextremismus.de/pdf\\_14/141120presse-handout.pdf](http://www.fes-gegen-rechtsextremismus.de/pdf_14/141120presse-handout.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.petrapau.de/18\\_bundestag/index.htm](http://www.petrapau.de/18_bundestag/index.htm).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.zeit.de/news/2015-02/25/extremismus-stiftung-mehr-antisemitische-straftaten-2014-25205206>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid [http://www.petrapau.de/18\\_bundestag/index.htm](http://www.petrapau.de/18_bundestag/index.htm)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.linguistik.tu-berlin.de/menue/mitarbeiterinnen/professorinnen/monika\\_schwarz-friesel/forschungsprojekte/](http://www.linguistik.tu-berlin.de/menue/mitarbeiterinnen/professorinnen/monika_schwarz-friesel/forschungsprojekte/)

Due to the severity of the radical antisemitic manifestations, which seemed to have surprised European leaders, on 22 July 2014, the Ministers of Foreign affairs of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier, France, Laurent Fabius, and Italy, Federica Mogherini, released a joint declaration in Brussels, which read as follows:

"Antisemitic incitement and hostility against Jews, attacks on people of Jewish faith and synagogues have no place in our societies..... Nothing, including the dramatic military confrontation in Gaza, justifies such action here in Europe. We will do everything in our countries together and ensure that all our citizens can continue to live unmolested by antisemitic hostility in peace and security."

According to Dr. Dieter Graumann, President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the tense atmosphere did not come out of nowhere. The conflict in Gaza cannot be seen as the cause of the insecurity many of the Jews in Germany feel due to this unprecedented rise in violent antisemitic acts, not only in Germany but in many of their neighboring countries.

"I am convinced that anyone who becomes antisemitic because of Israel has always been antisemitic and uses the current controversy only as an excuse. The word "Jew" has been used as an insult in German schoolyards for many years – very often by young Muslims." Germany has the largest Muslim population in Western Europe, after France. Approximately 3.0 to 3.5 million Muslims live in Germany, and 80% of them do not have German citizenship; 608,000 are German citizens.<sup>1</sup>, 100,000 of them are German converts to Islam. 70% of the Muslim population is of Turkish origin. Ca 44.000 are classified by the authorities as Islamists.

During the months of July-August and also in the aftermath of Operation Protective Edge, anti-Israel demonstrations received a momentum which shocked the political establishment, especially because of the fact that the violent anti-Jewish atmosphere, coupled with radical anti-Israel hatred, revealed antisemitic rhetoric never before heard in the streets of Germany after WWII. In July 2014, there were 5 reported incidents of violent physical assaults with antisemitic motivation, against persons in Wuppertal, Berlin, (twice) Hannover and Goettingen. During the same month, synagogues were desecrated and attacked in Dresden, Frankfurt, Gelsenkirchen, Marmen and Wuppertal, accompanying anti-Israel demonstrations with antisemitic incidents, whether verbal or physical, that took place in 23 towns all over Germany. Demonstrators in Dortmund and Frankfurt chanted, "Hamas, Hamas; Jews to the gas!" and Pro-Gaza protesters on Kurfürstendamm, Berlin, yelled, "Jews, Jews, cowardly swine." In Berlin police banned protestors from using the rallying cry "Jews to the Gas" and charges were filed against the sermon by a radical imam calling on worshippers at Berlin's Al-Nur mosque to murder "Zionist Jews. In Dortmund, Frankfurt and Gelsenkirchen, anti-Israel protesters chanted, "Hamas Hamas Juden ins gas!" ("Hamas Hamas Jews to the gas!"); demonstrators in Essen shouted, "*Scheiss Juden!*" ("Jewish shit"). The protestors are largely young, both immigrants and native Germans, many of Middle Eastern origin and of all ideological colors.

During July-August, cemeteries were desecrated in Staakow, Aachen, Sondershausen and Gröbzig.

Two months later, in view of the worsening of the situation for the Jewish community and the high level of violence, Chancellor Angela Merkel, President Joachim Gauck as well as

high-ranking religious and political leaders participated in a "Stand-Up: Jew-Hatred-Never Again!" rally organized on 14 September by the Central Council of Jews in Germany in the heart of Berlin's government district, the Brandenburg Tor, near the national Holocaust memorial. Chancellor Merkel declared that "It is our national and civic duty to fight antisemitism". But the crowd, of ca 6000-8000 that gathered there, organized by the Central Council of the Jewish Communities in Germany, was far from representative of the Mehrheitsgesellschaft; instead, it mainly represented the worried members of the Jewish communities, who were hoping in vain for an act of solidarity from the civil society that failed to join them, out of apathy, ignorance or underestimating the phenomenon. ". At the time of the rally, antisemitic smearings were reported from several sites in Berlin-Tiergarten, such as "Scheis Jude Baby Killa" (org. orthography) on the Haydn-Mozart-Beethoven monument and "Juden Raus" on public signs.

Again, a fact which has been observed in many western European countries is the discrepancy between official declarations of the representatives of the government and the behavior of the civil society. As early as July, during the heights of antisemitic manifestations, German president Joachim Gauck had asked for more civil courage (Zivilcourage) to fight this dangerous phenomenon, which Chancellor Angela Merkel had called an attack on freedom and tolerance.

Although criminal acts with extreme right wing background show a decrease, 10,541 acts compared to 11,761 in 2013, and the same trend also can be observed in violent incidents, which decreased from 574 in 2013 to 496 in 2014, there has been a significant rise in attacks on foreigners, including several arson attacks.

Due to the national debate about Islamist terror groups, as well as a sharp increase in the numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers arriving in Germany, xenophobic offenses have been on the rise throughout the country in 2014, according to Federal Criminal Police Office chief Holger Muench. The Office for the Defense of the Constitution, counts 22,000 far-right extremists, among them 25% neo-Nazi. Almost half of these extremists are considered to be ready to use violence.

PEGIDA, a protest movement of "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident", which was founded in October 2014 in Dresden by Lutz Bachmann, draws tens of thousands of people to their Monday demonstrations in many German cities, in what has been called the biggest anti-immigrant protests since the country's unification. The movement is supported by football hooligans and neo-Nazis. Josef Schuster, head of the Central Council, warns that the fear of Islamist terror is being "instrumentalized" to mobilize the masses, who are being indoctrinated with hatred. Several antisemitic manifestations were observed during these demos. Despite attempts to distance itself from affiliations with far-right groups, PEGIDA has previously joined forces with neo-Nazi elements. In Germany; its founder Lutz Bachmann resigned in January 2015 after it emerged that he had posted a photograph of himself as Hitler on his Facebook page with the caption: "He's back".