

Scandinavia 2013

The Jewish communities in Sweden are continually dwindling in size, and today there are less than 2,000 members in the Danish Jewish community and 7,000 in the Swedish communities. There are approximately 7,000 Jews in Denmark and 15,000 in Sweden. Norway and Finland have small Jewish populations, with approximately 1,500 Jews in Norway and 1,300 in Finland. The organized Jewish communities are situated in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, Sweden, Copenhagen, Denmark, Oslo and Trondheim, Norway and Helsinki, Finland.

The Jewish populations in all Scandinavian countries are slowly decreasing, partly due to a high median age, a high level of intermarriage and a generally low commitment to Jewish religious life and endogamy. Those Jews who do value a religious lifestyle and endogamy, tend to leave Scandinavia for the UK, the US or Israel, where the Jewish communities are larger. Even though antisemitism may be a contributing factor in some cases of Jewish emigration, as was assessed by the chairman of the Copenhagen Jewish community Finn Schwarz in an interview in Jyllands-Posten October 1, there are no evidence suggesting that it would be more, or even as, significant as the other factors mentioned above. In other words, if the Jewish communities had been larger and could offer a richer and more varied Jewish life, Scandinavian Jews would probably not move – at least not to the UK where the levels of antisemitism are comparable to the ones in Scandinavia.

Antisemitism

Most antisemitic incidents that occur in Scandinavia are unplanned, spur of the moment attacks or harassment of Jews identified as such by strangers passing them by in the street or some other public space. This sort of incidents has traditionally largely gone unreported, and therefore it has always been difficult to know how common they are.

Additionally, on the request of their community leaders, Scandinavian Jews take great care to disguise their Jewish identity in public exactly in order to avoid this kind of unpleasant incidents. Therefore, Scandinavian Jews make sure not to wear kippot, Jewish symbols or clothes with Hebrew text in public. A report published 2013 by the FRA, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, showed that 49 percent of the Jews in Sweden don't wear Jewish symbols, like a kippah or Star of David pendant, or even avoid going to Jewish community centers, synagogues or cemeteries for fear of antisemitic incidents. The EU average is 20 percent, according to the report.

This policy received some validation when the paper *The Local* published an article October 14 2013, describing what its reporter Patrick Reilly had experienced walking about the city of Malmö, Sweden, with a kippah for a day. Even though Reilly wasn't physically attacked, he was insulted in the street and people started at him menacingly wherever he went. He thought it was very uncomfortable. In a comment to *Tablet Magazine* October 22, Reilly said this was the first time he'd ever been afraid in Malmö.

Apart from such spontaneous incidents, there have also been a few antisemitic incidents during 2013 that can be described as planned or premeditated. For instance, sometime in the night between February 23 and 24 2013, someone nailed a Nazi flag to the door of the synagogue in Norrköping in central Sweden. There is no longer any active Jewish community in the city. 6 April 2013, before Shabbat services, members of the Jewish community in Malmö, Sweden, found two bottle caps outside the synagogue. The bottle caps were drawn on with an ink-pen. The drawing showed a Star of David equal to a swastika. The CFCA also reports a case of a woman in Malmö, Sweden, who's been documenting antisemitic graffiti on her front door. The published images were from November 7, 9, 20 2013 and January 16 2014.

There are no reports of major violent anti-Semitic incidents from Scandinavia in 2013. There are, however, a rising number of incidents reported in Sweden, especially in the country's third largest city Malmö with some 300,000 inhabitants and 700 Jews. In 2010

and 2011 together, 44 antisemitic incidents were reported, but in 2012 alone that number was 60 and in the first half of 2013, there were 35 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in Malmö. Most likely, however, this is the effect of an increased willingness to report such incidents and not an actual increase in incidents. This interpretation is based on improved community efforts and routines for reporting anti-Semitic incidents, as well as changing attitudes on the political level in the city, making combating anti-Semitism more of a priority in the city. For instance, the previous Mayor, Ilmar Reepalu, who was infamous for his way of belittling the problem of anti-Semitism or even blaming the Jews themselves for the problem, resigned July 1 2013. As late as June 20 2013, local newspaper Sydsvenskan revealed that the City of Malmö had refused to report an employee to the police for antisemitic hate crimes. The man in his 30s had repeatedly verbally attacked Jewish coworkers, and even though the City had him fired, it refused to launch a complaint or to reveal his identity.

An example of changing attitudes and growing awareness of the problem of antisemitism can be seen in the so-called kippah walks that have been arranged in Sweden since 2011, when it started in Malmö. May 18 2013, the president of Swedish Committee against Antisemitism, Willy Silberstein, and journalist Sofia Nerbrand arranged a kippah walk in Malmö. It was a protest against antisemitism in the city and some 300 people, mostly non-Jews, participated. The kippah walk took place during the week the Eurovision Song Contest was held in the city. The police did not allow the kippah walk's regular route, since the Swedish Palestine Network was demonstrating against the Israeli participation in ESC along that route.

Also in other Scandinavian countries, there were responses to antisemitism. January 28 2013, the Danish daily Politiken published a statement from a principal of one of the seven schools in Nørrebro, a part of Copenhagen with a large proportion of inhabitants born outside of Denmark. Principal Lise Egholm warned Jewish parents against sending their children to her or any of the other schools in Nørrebro due to several recent cases of harassments against Jewish pupils by Muslim pupils. Egholm said that it's unacceptable that Jewish children must leave the area schools, but added that she had a responsibility

for her pupils and must take reality into account. The Copenhagen Jewish Community commented that it's aware of the problem at Nørrebro. The article led to a solidarity manifestation February 23 2013. Then, dozens of demonstrators gathered outside a Nørrebro school protesting the harassment of Jewish pupils. Demonstrators held up signs reading "Today we are all Jews."

In Finland, businessman and owner of a supermarket chain Juha Kärkkäinen was fined €45,000 October 22 2013 for "inciting hatred against an ethnic group" in articles published in the free magazine Magneetti Media distributed to over 360,000 homes by the J Kärkkäinen supermarket chain. The court also ordered him to take down the offensive articles from Magneetti Media's website. The paper has published a string of articles with anti-Semitic content, including an article based on The Protocols of the Elders of Zion in 2013. The article with the Protocols was taken from Radio Islam, the well known anti-Semitic website run by Ahmed Rami. The paper has also published articles by former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke and Ted Pike, an anti-Semitic pastor from Oregon, USA.

The relatively low Scandinavian number of antisemitic incidents in 2013 can probably be linked to the relative quiet in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the less prominent place this conflict has received in the media and public discourse in Scandinavia in 2013. The anti-Israeli demonstrations that were legion in the last few years have been few virtually non-existent. There is, however, no reason to assume that this is a sign of a weakening of anti-Zionist or anti-Israeli sentiments in Scandinavia – just the absence of trigger events. With all likelihood, a new military operation or war between Israel and the Palestinians or someone else in the region would probably cause the same old anti-Zionist sentiments to resurface. Experience shows that as soon as the situation between Israel and the Palestinians, or some of the Arab neighbor states, turn violent, the number of antisemitic incidents increase in Scandinavia – as well as in the rest of the world – as the local Scandinavian Jews are forced to serve as scapegoats within reach for anger and frustration at Israel.

Despite the lull, Israel remains a sensitive topic in Scandinavian political discourse, and some people blur the line between Israel and Jews in general. For instance, November 16 2013, Trond Andresen, professor at NTNU university in Trondheim, Norway, said to a student paper that he boycotted the university's Kristallnacht commemoration because it "served Israeli propaganda". He added that there is no problem of anti-Semitism today, and that non-Zionists should stop talk about it since it only serves Israel's interests. November 19, university spokesperson Jan Erik Kaaro distanced himself from Andresen's statement, stressing it was not university opinion. In 2009 and 2011, Andresen, a longstanding member of the communist party RV/Rødt, tried to get the NTNU to adopt a policy of complete boycott of Israel.

Extremists: Populists, Neo-Nazis and Islamists

Rightwing extremist elements have moved their positions forward in Scandinavia in 2013. This holds true for the populist as well as the ideological extreme right.

The populist extreme right, primarily embodied in populist parties such as the Progress Party in Norway, the Sweden Democrats and the Danish People's Party, have held their positions or advanced in polls. In Sweden, the previously shunned Sweden Democrats have been securely positioned as the third largest party in the polls throughout the year, with some 10% of the voters' support (the party has 5% of the seats in the Riksdag since the 2010 elections). On September 9, the Progress Party received 16.3% of the votes in the Norwegian parliamentary elections, and is now a member of the rightwing coalition government with seven portfolios, including finance, justice and oil. This is the first time since the end of the War that an extreme rightwing party controls ministries in Scandinavia.

Going against this trend, the True Finns are struggling, and the party has been plagued by some scandals in later years, forcing it to focus on internal consolidation and thus losing forward motion. For instance, June 11 2012 the True Finns representative in Helsinki town council, Jussi Halla-aho, was convicted of hate speech by the Finnish Supreme Court. In 2008, Halla-aho wrote that Islam is a "pedophile religion" and that Somalis are

genetically predisposed for criminality. Politicians and media in Finland demanded that Halla-aho step down, but the True Finns Party will not take any actions against him because of the conviction.

Another branch of the populist extreme right are various counter-jihad and anti-Islam movements, such as Stop the Islamization of Norway (SIAN), Stop the Islamization of Denmark (SIAD), Danish Defence League (DDL), Norwegian Defence League (NDL) and Swedish Defence League (SDL). These organizations have a strong presence online, but usually fail to attract more than a handful of followers to demonstrations. May 25 2013, Norwegian Defence League demonstrated in Trondheim. The demonstration only attracted less than 10 participants, four speakers and five listeners. More than 50 counter-demonstrators attacked the NDL-demonstration and drowned out their speakers with noise. July 20 2013 an anti-Islam demonstration organized by SIAN (Stop the Islamization of Norway) in Furuset only drew nine participants. Some 75 counter-demonstrators drowned out the speech given by SIAN leader Arne Turmyr. March 23 2013, Swedish Defence League demonstrated in Malmö in southern Sweden. Counter-demonstrators clashed with police before the SDL demonstration. Only some 20 SDL supporters participated, whereas the counter-demonstration had almost 600 participants. Some 100 policemen were at the scene.

One of NDL's online activities 2013 was the February 27 publication of a list of organizations and companies run or owned by Muslims in Norway. The list contains hundreds of entries. Another important forum for populist extreme rightwingers is various alternative news sites, such as Fria Tider (Free Times), Vaken (Awake) and Avpixlat (De-Pixled). Avpixlat is one of the four most visited websites in Swedish online, with hundreds of thousands of visits per year, more than most Swedish online newspapers and TV-channels. The site has a certain number of commentators in Norwegian and Danish as well, indicating that its readership is not limited to Sweden. The site publishes news about problems surrounding immigration and multi-culturalism, things it claims the main media hushes up. In the beginning of December, several high-ranking members of the Sweden Democrats were caught posting highly inflammatory

and racist comments on the site, urging Muslims to kill each other, letting refugee children starve to death rather than letting them into Sweden and comparing immigrants to locusts and pests.

These sites are openly critical to immigration, calling themselves “pro-Swedish”, and the talkbacks and comments are frequently racist. There are, however, relatively few examples of specifically anti-Semitic content. When it can be found, it’s usually in the form of Holocaust denial, or attacks on the right to perform circumcision or wear religiously distinctive clothes. The latter instances are, however, usually directed against Muslims – although such laws would affect Jews, too. Even though the discourse on the populist extreme right isn’t particularly anti-Semitic (as opposed to xenophobic, racist and anti-Muslim), individual members of populist parties and groups in all Scandinavian countries are from time to time caught making anti-Semitic statements, usually regarding a Jewish world conspiracy, Jewish control of the banks/media/Hollywood/the US administration or Holocaust denial.

As opposed to the populist extreme right, anti-Semitism is rife and prevalent within the ideological extreme right, a milieu dominated by neo-Nazi groups. The Swedish anti-racist NGO EXPO publishes an annual report on the racist extreme right in Sweden, and its 2013 report shows an increase in activity in this milieu. They report 2,333 activities in 2013, an increase with 28 percent since 2012 and the highest number since the first annual report in 2008. This can partly be explained by increased political activity in preparation of the elections in 2014. Most activities concern spreading propaganda: 1,884 activities, compared to 1,351 in 2012. The number of demonstrations and manifestations also increased to 224 from 179. At the same time, the number of known racist rightwing extremist organizations has decreased since 2008 from more than 40 to 12 in 2013. At the same time, those 12 are more active and better organized. Two organizations are responsible for the increase: The Swedish Resistance Movement (SMR) and Swedes’ Party (SvP). Other organizations were Nordic Youth, the Union for National Youth, Nordic National Socialists and the National Democrats. These six made up 95.5 per cent of all incidents.

Some of the activities reported led to violent incidents. For example, May 24, about 50 SMR activists went to the Stockholm suburb of Storvreten to “quench” unrest among the immigrant population there. Clashes ensued. July 12 2013 members of the Swedes Party (SP) attacked leftwing activists in Halmstad with knives and an axe. The Leftwing activists had come to sabotage a demonstration arranged by SP. 15 people were involved in the incident. One person was taken to hospital for treatment of cuts. July 16, EXPO reported that the police had trouble advancing in the investigation since none of the victims were willing to talk to the police. August 10 2013 a man in Uppsala, Sweden, had to be hospitalized after being attacked by neo-Nazis. The neo-Nazis filmed bystanders during a demonstration, and when a woman tried to avoid being filmed she was attacked. When the man tried to protect her he was attacked by several of the neo-Nazis. September 14 2013, the Swedes’ Party organized a demonstration in central Stockholm together with participation also from SMR and the National Democrats. The demonstration drew some 180 participants, and several times more counter-demonstrations. The counter-demonstrators tried to interfere in the demonstration and threw objects at the neo-Nazis, who answered by attacking and throwing objects back. October 5, an exhibition at a shopping mall in central Stockholm highlighting the dire situation of refugees, was attacked with a smoke grenade. Before the attack, activists handed out propaganda leaflets for SMR. November 9, SMR activists demonstrated at the Greek embassy protesting the Greek government crackdown on Golden Dawn. At the end of the demonstration, that took place on the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the SMR activists attacked counter demonstrators, one of whom had to be hospitalized. December 15 2013, some 50 members of SMR attacked a peaceful protest against neo-Nazi graffiti in a Stockholm suburb. The SMR members attacked with bottles, stones, firecrackers and knives and the ten policemen at the scene could not protect the demonstrators. Two were stabbed and one of them hospitalized.

There has also been some neo-Nazi activity in the other Scandinavian countries. January 31 2013, three well-known neo-Nazis tried to interrupt the launching of a book on the Finnish extreme right at Jyväskylä city library. The three, armed with knives and bottles,

tried to enter the hall where the authors Li Andersson and Mikael Brunila spoke to an audience of some 100 people. They were stopped by a security guard who was injured and had to be taken to hospital. The three men were later arrested. They belong to the Finnish Resistance Movement, a branch of the neo-Nazi Swedish Resistance Movement. March 1 2013, Finnish police informed the Jewish community that they had uncovered a neo-Nazi gathering information about Finnish Jews. The list of Jews was discovered when the man was arrested for the attack in Jyväskylä January 31. The USB-stick contained information and photos, mostly about young Jews. One neo-Nazi demonstration was also held in Norway in 2013, in Trondheim March 10. Almost all the demonstrators arrested at that event were Swedish supporters, once again stressing last year's conclusion that the Swedish neo-Nazi movements are the motor that propels the Scandinavian ideological extreme right as a whole.

A third kind of extremism, and one where antisemitism is frequently encountered, is the Islamist discourse. There are several hundred thousand Muslims in Scandinavia. In such a large group of people, there are bound to be some that hold extremist views, and in later years the media has been keener on reporting about them and exposing their extremist positions. Especially misogynic and homophobic statements are reported and condemned in Scandinavian media, but also examples of antisemitism are sometimes criticized.

January 17 2013, the Norwegian daily Dagsavisen published an interview with Nehmat Ali Shah, imam at the Central Jamaat-e Ahl-e Sunnat Mosque in Oslo and the mosque's president Ghulam Sarwar. In the interview, the two men claim that the negative media coverage of Muslims they think exists in Norway is because the Jews control Norwegian media. May 19 2013, a clip with Fahad Qureshi, founder of Islam Net in Norway was published online. The clip shows Qureshi at a meeting claiming that "all normal Muslims" think homosexuals and women who have extra-marital sex should be stoned to death. The audience raises its hands in support of these statements. Fahad Qureshi founded Islam Net in 2008 when he was an engineer student. Islam Net is a Muslim organization aiming to spread Islam in Norway, especially among young people. The organization is controversial for its strict separation of the sexes during public meetings,

and for its openly calling non-Muslims “kuffar”, i.e. “heathens”. August 26 2013, Danish Islamist extremist Abu Khatab published a clip on YouTube where he threatened to kill a number of Danes: the president of the anti-Islam Association for Free Press (Trykkefrihedselskabet) Lars Hedegaard, the cartoonist Kurt Westergaard who drew cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad, former secret service agent Morten Storm, NATO General Secretary and former Danish PM Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the former Islamist imam Ahmed Akkari who now works to conter extreme Islam in Denmark and the politician Naser Khader. At the end of the clip, their photos are placed on a wall and shot. Several of these individuals have been threatened before. May 19 2013, Mahmoud Aldebe, former member and activist in the Center Party, currently in government in Sweden, wrote in the Swedish Arabic news site Arabnyheter. In the article he claims that Muslims who, like himself and Social-Democrat Omar Mustafa, who want to advance in the political system in Sweden must first “deny their convictions, for instance the hatred against Zionism and to accept homosexuality.” Aldebe writes that this is because the Swedish political parties “have decided to follow the international Zionism in order to marginalize and divide the interests of the Muslim minority.” This wasn’t the first time Aldebe wrote anti-Semitic texts for Arabnyheter, which also has published texts by Holocaust-denier Lasse Wilhelmsson and Israel Shamir. Aldebe was forced to leave the Center Party due to his views on women and homosexuality. Aldebe has also been the spokesman for Sweden’s Muslim Union in the beginning of the 21st century.