On Guard

A French soldier secures a Jewish institution in western Paris after Islamist militants killed 17 people in January.

By Abraham H. Foxman

EUROPE

Through the Lens of Anti-Semitism
The history of the Jewish people in Europe is fraught with examples of the worst human rights violations—forced conversions, expulsions, inquisitions, pogroms and the genocide to end all genocides, the murder of six million Jews and millions of others in the Holocaust. These have been perpetrated by governments, dictators and the Catholic Church itself. Today, many of these historic threats have diminished or disappeared. There is no Hitler, Stalin or Mussolini to threaten European Jewry. Church-based anti-Semitism is largely a thing of the past. There is no government or society seeking to annihilate its Jews. But newer manifestations of anti-Semitism have emerged.

In some countries, such as Germany, Jewish life is flourishing again. And yet the Jewish communities of Europe are under verifiable threats—terrorism, daily violence, harassment, intimidation and infringements on religious freedom—emanating from fringe sectors of society, even as governments try to protect their Jewish communities.

How bad is it? A 2013 survey by the European Union’s Fundamental Rights Agency revealed tremendous insecurity in the continent’s Jewish communities. Almost half of the respondents worried about being insulted or harassed in public for being Jewish, and a third worried about becoming victims of physical assault. Three-quarters responded that anti-Semitism had increased over the previous five years.

And that was before the attacks in Copenhagen, Paris and Brussels. After three major terror attacks against Jewish targets in the past 12 months, some people are asking whether Europe’s Jewish communities are at a tipping point. Will they collapse from a combination of mass emigration and widespread withdrawal from Jewish life?

I think the answer is an unqualified no. But we must do all that we can to ensure that European leaders and governments aren’t just paying lip service to the notion of Never Again.

Perhaps the starting point should be a different question. Do Jews in Europe feel free to live openly and fully as Jews? Sadly, the answer is no in far too many places. Terror attacks against Jewish targets grab the headlines, but several other factors affect the confidence level of Europe’s Jews and they vary among countries.

Five major factors affect the confidence level of people to live openly and freely as Jews: the degree of anti-Semitic attitudes held by the general population; the number and nature of anti-Semitic...
incidents; the reaction of governments and civil society to those incidents; anti-Semitism in politics and media; and recent troubling restrictions on religious freedom, specifically on male circumcision and kosher slaughter. I will address the first four of these factors here.

**Attitudes**

In May 2014, the Anti-Defamation League released a worldwide survey of anti-Semitic attitudes. The ADL Global 100: An Index of Anti-Semitism surveyed 53,100 adults in 102 countries and territories in an effort to establish, for the first time, a database on the level and intensity of anti-Jewish sentiment. The overall index score represents the percentage of respondents who answered “probably true” to 6 or more of 11 negative stereotypes.

The average index score for European Union member states was 25 percent: One in four citizens agreed with a majority of the anti-Semitic stereotypes tested.

Not all the news was bad. Several states were among the lowest scorers in the world. Sweden (4 percent), The Netherlands (5 percent), and the United Kingdom (8 percent) all scored better than the United States (9 percent), and Denmark was tied. Other European Union states had disappointing scores: France (37 percent), Hungary (41 percent), Bulgaria (44 percent), Poland (45 percent), Greece was an astounding 69 percent, making it the worst-scoring nation outside the Middle East and North Africa.

**Incidents**

There is a massive data deficit because the majority of European Union countries do not monitor or document anti-Semitic crimes as a separate category in police records. Only 9 of the 28 states publish data on anti-Semitic crimes. Compounding the problem is underreporting. The survey showed 76 percent of victims of anti-Semitic harassment did not report incidents to police or to a Jewish organization; neither did a startling 64 percent of victims of physical violence.

The data we do have from France and the United Kingdom indicate severe problems with anti-Semitic violence, especially compared to the United States. Vandalism and harassment discourage communities, but physical violence is of utmost concern. Comparing the numbers of violent anti-Semitic incidents between 2008 and 2014 in England, France and the United States demonstrates the gap between American Jews and British and French Jews.

In France, per 100,000 Jews, there were 15 assaults a year over that seven-year period. In England, there were 31 assaults per 100,000 Jews per year. In the United States, ADL’s annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents reported an annual average of just 0.4 assaults per 100,000 Jews.

French Jews are almost 40 times more at risk of being assaulted than American Jews. British Jews are almost 80 times more at risk. By contrast, there are communities with over 20,000 Jews—Italy, Spain, Hungary and Sweden—where very few anti-Semitic physical assaults are reported.

Numbers do not tell the whole story. The nature of the violence also matters. Four out of the five recent anti-Semitic murders in Europe were committed by French citizens against French Jews—most recently the murders at a kosher supermarket in Paris in January.

The problems in France should be seen through the lens of terrorism. A small number of anti-Semites are using violence against Jews and causing widespread insecurity. In the 2013 European Union survey, 60 percent of French Jews said they expected to be the victim of an anti-Semitic physical assault over the next 12 months. Half said they usually or always avoided wearing a kippa or other outward sign of being Jewish. Asked if they had considered emigrating in the last five years, 46 percent said yes.

In England, the Jewish community has not been hit with similar acts of terrorism. The European Union survey showed much higher levels of confidence, despite suffering double the number of anti-Semitic assaults on a per capita basis in the past seven years. While 19 percent reported being the victim of an anti-Semitic incident during the prior 12 months—almost the same as in France—only 17 percent feared being the victim of a physical assault over the next 12 months.

And British Jews do not hide their Jewishness. Forty-one percent said they never avoid wearing Jewish symbols, and 37 percent said they do so only occasionally. Just 18 percent of British Jews had considered emigrating over the previous five years, tied for the lowest in the union.

**Government Response**

Responses to anti-Semitism by politicians and law enforcement can be assessed with objective criteria. Officials make statements, or they don’t. Hate crimes are prosecuted, or they’re not. Education programs are in place, or they are not.

The British parliament conducted an inquiry into anti-Semitism several years ago and made 35 proposals, which successive governments have been implementing. Prime Minister David Cameron and other cabinet ministers made strong public comments about anti-Semitism.

In France, new measures to tackle anti-Semitism are being developed and will address law enforcement, education, the Internet, radicalization in prisons and other topics. Effective policies, though, are not sufficient. The government must restore a sense of confidence for the community.

Prime Minister Manuel Valls took an important step with his landmark speech to the National Assembly on
January 13, in which he lamented that French politicians and society had not mustered the outrage that the rise in anti-Semitic acts demanded.

Unfortunately, we have not seen such statements and actions across the European Union. In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel and other government leaders have spoken out forcefully against anti-Semitism, but German nongovernmental organizations combating anti-Semitism have been dissatisfied with policy implementation and inadequate government funding of programs.

In Belgium, the Jewish community again called on the government to implement adequate security, legislative and legal measures after the Copenhagen attack—eight months after the deadly attack at the Brussels Jewish museum. In Hungary, Poland, Romania and Spain, very few complaints about anti-Semitic incidents result in legal action.

**Public Discourse**

Where anti-Semitism occurs in politics and media, public discourse is poisoned and the effects on the Jewish community are predictable. Hungary is one of two European Union countries with a neo-Nazi party in parliament. The Jobbik Party received 21 percent of the vote in the last election. While violent anti-Semitic incidents are rare, in the European Union survey more Hungarians reported being the targets of harassment than in any of the surveyed countries. Hungary also had the highest number of respondents who have considered emigrating: 48 percent.

Greece is home to the other neo-Nazi parliamentary party in the union. Golden Dawn came in third in last January’s election with more than 6 percent of the vote.

So what needs to be done to guarantee a future for Jews in Europe? We know the communities of Western Europe are concerned about physical attacks, largely by Islamic extremists. Public officials must recognize these fears and clearly identify their source as terrorism.

We know that in Central and Eastern Europe, extremist political parties, media and public discourse make Jews nervous. There, the questions are not only about safety. Public officials, governments and civil society must recognize the threat these parties pose. And we need the United States and other nations to raise their moral voices against the acceptance of these parties into the mainstream.

We know that where problems are ignored, even if synagogues are not burning, we see despair. And so we need governments to address the critical issues of security, counter-radicalization and education.

We should make no mistake: The future of Europe’s Jewish communities hangs in the balance. 

Abraham H. Foxman will retire as national director of the Anti-Defamation League in July.

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**United Kingdom Worries in a Golden Age**

By Miriam Shaviv

Natalie, a mother of three, was chatting to a worker at a children’s play center in the heart of Jewish London when a party of kippa-wearing boys came in. “Because I don’t look Jewish,” she recalled, “he turned to me and sighed, ‘Oh no, Jews.’ I turned to him and asked what he meant by that. ‘They’re just like animals. These Jews are the worst.’ I felt physically sick—my heart was palpitating.”

The incident, which prompted her to complain to the manager, seems typical of the low-grade anti-
It is Friday lunchtime on the rue des Rosiers in the Marais, the heart of the Jewish quarter of Paris. Normally the pedestrian street would be bustling, filled with people shopping in the chic boutiques that line the sidewalk or purchasing last minute food for Shabbat in one of several butchers or delicatessens, or just enjoying a falafel, the area’s premium street food, good enough to rival Tel Aviv’s best.

But, since January’s terror attack a few miles away at a Hypercacher kosher supermarket, the rue des Rosiers has been quiet. Armed soldiers patrol the street, which contains several synagogues—as they now do in the vicinity of every synagogue and Jewish school in France. American-born Rabbi Tom Cohen, Party Enquiry Into Antisemitism, it is generally agreed that government leaders recognize the problem.

Indeed, in other respects, this is a golden age for British Jewry. Some 60 percent of Jewish children go to mostly state-funded Jewish schools—up from 25 percent in the 1970s. There is a flourishing of British-Jewish literature and arts, and the opening of a $75-million Jewish community center in London in 2013 was symbolic of a larger thriving of communal facilities.

According to a 2012 report by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, “[A]nti-Semitism in Britain...continues to be one of the top issues on the Jewish communal agenda.... At the same time, British Jews have arguably never before been so confident about their Jewishness, and so open about displaying it in public places.”

But there has been a shift in the communal mood in recent months: This follows the Gaza war last summer; a rise in awareness of jihadi activity in Britain, and the flow of British Muslims to fight for the Islamic State; and the rise of anti-Semitism on the continent. Following the attack on the Paris Hypercacher market, more than 150 British Jews contacted the CST to volunteer.

“People watched it on a 24-hour news cycle and know it could have happened here,” said Gardner. “It had tremendous impact.” Several months later, he said, “the alarm has subsided, but it hasn’t completely gone. The basic level of anxiety is at a different place than before Paris.”

Natalie, for one, aims to move to Israel: “I was so distraught by some of the things that my colleagues were putting on their Facebook feeds about Israel during the Gaza war, I feel that there’s no future here.” So far, she is in a tiny minority. But the rest of Anglo-Jewry is certainly jumpier than it used to be.

Miriam Shaviv is a columnist for the Jewish Chronicle in the United Kingdom.
who heads a small French-American synagogue and is married to Rabbi Pauline Bebe (France’s first woman rabbi), lives in the neighborhood. He acknowledged that the guards are both necessary and reassuring in the climate of heightened tension.

France has the largest Jewish and Muslim populations living side by side outside Israel. Over the past six decades, tensions between the two have increased, with spikes in anti-Jewish violence closely correlating to periods of violence in the Middle East. Last summer, during Operation Protective Edge, there were several attacks on Jewish businesses and synagogues. An in-depth study by political scientist Dominique Reynié, published just before the Charlie Hebdo and Hypercacher attacks, found that 50 percent of racist attacks in France had Jews as their target, although Jews number less than 1 percent of the French population.

Many religious Jewish men and boys now choose to wear baseball caps over their kippot in public to avoid attracting the verbal or physical violence that is so common nowadays that it barely merits a mention in local newspapers. For nonreligious Jews, too, anti-Semitism is often a fact of life. I am horrified when the two teenage daughters of my friend whose own citizens have killed Jews because they are Jewish.

“For the most part,” said Cohen, “the French don’t really care about what happens with the Jews. It’s only when it starts to affect the rest of the population that they start to worry.”

Repeated government pronouncements committing to protecting the Jewish community, most frequently and passionately made by Prime Minister Manuel Valls, do not change the reality for French Jews, who live in the shadow of both casual day-to-day anti-Semitism and the unlikely but nonetheless real threat of murderous violence; France is the only country in Europe whose own citizens have killed Jews because they are Jewish.

“Unfortunately, the majority of the French don’t really care about what happens with the Jews. It’s only when it starts to affect the rest of the population that they start to worry.”

For example, when three Jewish children and a rabbi were shot at a Jewish school in Toulouse in 2012, a few days after the same killer gunned down three soldiers of North African origin in the city, only a few thousand people went out on the streets. Compare that with the 3.5 million who marched in solidarity after the Charlie Hebdo killings.

As a society, France has much work to do to bring about the unity for which those 3.5 million people marched two months ago.

Natasha Lehrer writes for the Guardian and the Jewish Chronicle.

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**Hungary**

**The Politics of Hate**

By Ruth Ellen Gruber

Anti-Semitism is on the rise in Hungary, but it is a complex problem that is part of a broader national crisis encompassing a range of political, economic and social ills.

Recent research shows that the percentage of hardcore anti-Semites in Hungary has more than doubled in the past two decades to somewhere between 21 and 28 percent of the population. Nearly one-third of Hungarians believe anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, such as “Jews seek to rule the world.”

Such conspiracy theories “are the most dangerous form of anti-Semitism, leading to the strongest discrimination against Jews,” according to a 2014 report by the Budapest think tank Political Capital institute.

Much of the rise in anti-Semitism has been linked to the emergence of the radical nationalist Jobbik Party, which won more than 20 percent of the vote in 2014.

Seeking scapegoats for a range of woes, Jobbik uses virulent anti-Israel, anti-Jewish and anti-Roma rhetoric to galvanize support, frequently playing on conspiracy fears. Anti-Semitic outbursts by Jobbik politicians, meanwhile, have increasingly served to legitimize hate speech in private conversations, public discourse and the political arena.

Mainstream parties and Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s rightist government avoid such explicit rhetoric and, in fact, condemn anti-Semitism.

Nonetheless, the 2014 Political Capital report stated that “symbolic and ‘lurking’ anti-Semitic messages coming from opinion-leaders of the right-wing camp sometimes serve as tools for the conscious provocation of the political opposition and intellectuals. The reluctance of leading politicians to distance themselves...
from these statements clearly does not help reduce anti-Semitism.”

Andras Mayer, a leader of Teleki Ter, an Orthodox congregation that meets in a tiny shtiebel in Budapest’s rundown 8th district, agreed. “The government is—at best—passive about this,” he said. “They love to erect monuments to dead Jews, instead of doing something for the living.”

The rise in anti-Semitism has ratcheted up the anxiety level of Hungary’s 100,000 or more Jews, most of whom are in the capital. The acceptance of anti-Semitism in public discourse sets Hungary apart from other European countries, said Linda Vero-Ban, a Jewish educator whose husband, Tamas Vero, is the rabbi at Budapest’s Frankel synagogue, whose growing congregation caters to young families.

“I hear stories every day from elementary, high school and university students about how they experience open anti-Semitism, both from their teachers and classmates,” she said.

“Teachers and professors dare to make anti-Semitic comments because it has no consequences, and the same situation occurs in parliament,” she said. “Students are in a difficult situation because they know that if they raise their voice against it nobody would stand by their side.”

According to Political Capital, one-third of Hungary’s Jews are worried about physical attacks and two-thirds are concerned about verbal harassment. About one-half had considered emigrating over the past five years.

Mayer said a lot of his friends have left, “permanently or semipermanently,” with anti-Semitism just one factor in their decision. “It was more because of the political situation—of which anti-Semitism is a part—but also for better jobs, better possibilities, the usual stuff.”

A 2014 poll found that about half of all Hungarians between 20 and 35 would consider leaving the country for economic or other reasons.

Political Captital Director Peter Kreko said current debates on anti-Semitism in Hungary both downplay and exaggerate the dangers. “Anti-Semitic public discourse is definitely a problem,” he said. “On the other hand, fortunately, most Hungarians are not open anti-Semites, and the Jews in Hungary are not in physical danger. Unlike in Western Europe, anti-Semitic incidents in Hungary are rare and sporadic. While vigilance is important, we should avoid becoming hysterical over this issue.

“If Jews leave Hungary due to rising fears,” he added, “the anti-Semites are just winning the fight.”

There is a growing anxiety in the Swedish Jewish community following the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen, and security has been ramped up at Jewish buildings around the country, including synagogues and schools.

Swedish Jews are not alone, of course, in feeling nervous about the threat of attacks by homegrown terrorists, but after the fatal shooting of a Jewish security guard outside Copenhagen’s synagogue, many ask: Will Sweden be next? After all, the Swedish city of Malmö in the south is just a 20-minute train ride from central Copenhagen, and Malmö has acquired a global reputation for hostility to Jews.

In December 2009, the Simon Wiesenthal Center issued a travel advisory warning Jews to avoid Malmö.
The move came after an Israel solidarity demonstration ended in violence as participants were pelted with eggs, bottles and firecrackers. Then-Malmö Mayor Ilmar Reepalu suggested Jews could avoid anti-Semitism by condemning Israeli policy.

Many local Jews were irritated by the Wiesenthal center’s move, arguing that it sent a skewed and exaggerated signal to the world. But three years later, the community welcomed Hannah Rosenthal, President Obama’s special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism. She traveled to Malmö to talk to representatives of the Jewish community and to have a closed-door meeting with Reepalu, who by then had made a series of controversial statements about Jews. Rosenthal’s successor, Ira Forman, visited in late March to assess how Sweden handles threats against and harassment of Jewish citizens today.

Just as in other European countries, anti-Semitic hate crimes and hostile discussions on social media tend to increase as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict intensifies. While the Swedish community leaders speak of a continued threat from fringe groups on the left and right, today, most anti-Semitic attacks and sentiments are believed to come from Muslims or citizens with roots in the Middle East.

In Malmö, Sweden’s third-largest city, Muslims make up a fifth of the population of 300,000. Just around 800 of Sweden’s roughly 20,000 Jews live in Malmö. A Swedish television documentary that aired in January showed a reporter getting pelted with eggs and subjected to verbal abuse while wearing a kippa and a Star of David in the city. According to the documentary, there were 87 reported cases of anti-Semitic hate crimes in Malmö in 2013 and 2014. Not a single case has led to a prosecution. Incidents reported as hate crimes have ranged from verbal abuse and desecration of a synagogue and cemetery to an attack on a Jewish community building with explosives and bricks.

At the same time, mainstream society has begun to take note of anti-Semitism after the Copenhagen attack and, even before then, non-Jewish residents in Malmö and elsewhere organized and participated in kippa walks in solidarity with the country’s Jews.

While old prejudices about Jews persist, the motivations and forms of threats to Jewish communities in Sweden, as elsewhere in Europe, have changed.

Nathalie Rothschild is a journalist based in Stockholm.

**Germany**

**Is There a Cycle of Solidarity?**

By Toby Axelrod

With the recent terrorist attacks against Jews in Paris and Copenhagen, Jews in Germany, too, are jittery. They reflexively ask themselves—as during every crisis—whether it is time to pack their bags.

So far, most are staying, despite urgings from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israel’s ambassador to Germany, Yakov Hadas-Handelsman, to emigrate.

In fact, Josef Schuster, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said there is no special reason for Jews to leave now. Threats against Jews and their institutions are a “worldwide phenomenon,” he remarked. Why would it be better in Israel?

For most Jews here, life proceeds normally. The more than 100,000 members of Jewish communities nationwide—and at least another 100,000 unaffiliated—accept the increased security at Jewish schools and synagogues, and believe it is the
government’s job to protect them.

But many are nervous: This year has seen an increase in both high- and low-profile anti-Semitism, from cries of “death to Zionists and Israel” at demonstrations, to an arson attack on a synagogue, to anti-Semitic name-calling in schoolyards. Recently, the city of Bremen went on alert after reports of a planned attack by Islamic extremists.

Across Europe, Jewish social activists have been filming themselves walking through various cities wearing kippot. When Israeli-German actor Amit Jacobi tried it in Berlin, no one noticed him, even in so-called problem zones. But “that doesn’t mean that there is no anti-Semitism in Germany,” he noted.

“I don’t think such tests reveal too much,” agreed Rabbi Daniel Alter, an official of the Berlin Jewish Community. Alter himself was beaten outside his home in 2012 by assailants who also verbally threatened his daughter.

Germany’s commission on anti-Semitism reports that the level of latent anti-Semitism is stable at 20 percent. Anti-Semitic crimes dropped from 1,809 in 2006 to 1,275 in 2013 (the last year for which figures were available at this writing). There is a sense that incidents increased in 2014 because of Israel’s intervention in Gaza.

There’s a concern among Jews that the government doesn’t fully comprehend the threat of anti-Semitism. Chancellor Angela Merkel has reiterated her commitment to protecting the Jewish community, which has grown dramatically since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Yet, earlier this year the government wiggled out of defining anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism, even though the Bundestag passed a working definition in 2008 of anti-Semitism that included the delegitimization of Israel.

“In general, there is a more public face emerging regarding anti-Semitism, noticeable on the streets, in schoolyards and on sports fields,” said Deidre Berger, head of the American Jewish Committee office in Berlin. “There is also an explosion of anti-Semitic expression on the Internet and social media....”

Berger has joined with two Jewish activists—Anetta Kahane, head of the Berlin-based Amadeu Antonio Foundation, and Julius Schoeps, founding director of the Moses Mendelssohn Center for European Jewish Studies in Potsdam—to form a new commission on anti-Semitism in response to the Interior Ministry’s failure to appoint a single Jew to its panel on anti-Semitism.

“It is difficult to convince politicians to create action plans and government responses to anti-Semitism if they are not cognizant of the dimensions of the problem,” Berger said.

But there are some who get it. This winter, Judge Gauri Sastry in Essen told a defendant of Turkish descent that he had crossed the line from protester to anti-Semite when he called for death and hate to Zionists. “In the common parlance of anti-Semites, Zionist is a code word for Jew,” Sastry said.

Anti-Semitism has to be stopped in the classroom, before it gets to the courtroom, said Bernhard Heider, director of Leadership Berlin, a program he launched after hearing reports about anti-Semitism in schools. Heider brings local Muslim and Jewish religious leaders into sixth-grade religion classes in schools with large Muslim populations. “We are trying to strengthen moderate Muslims and give them a chance to set an example,” Heider said.

In Berlin today, one can see a poster featuring Alter sharing a tandem bicycle with Berlin Imam Ferid Heider. As part of the campaign against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, the two led a bike tour, Cycling Unites, in March.

The issue is not security, Alter said. “We are safe in Berlin, we have some of the best security of any Jewish institutions in the world,” he observed. “But these other aspects—the exclusion, the discrimination, the use of ‘Jew’ as a derogatory term—you don’t have that in Israel.”

Journalist Toby Axelrod lives in Berlin and is academic director of the Leo Baeck Summer University in Jewish Studies of Humboldt Universität at Berlin.