

## **Anti-Semitism and the De-legitimization of Israel in Europe: TIP's Response to the Growing Threat**

### **LAURA KAM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR GLOBAL AFFAIRS:**

Hello, I am Laura Kam TIP's Executive Director for Global Affairs. Thank you for joining us.

In the past few years has Europe witnessed an upsurge in serious and violent anti-Semitic attacks unprecedented in recent times. In addition, the growing BDS (Boycott, Sanctions, Divestment) movement points to a "new anti-Semitism" where deligitimization, double standards and demonization of Israel can have serious economic and political consequences. Perceptions of the 22-day defensive war in the Gaza Strip, the ensuing Goldstone Report and the flotilla incident, certainly triggered this most recent spasm of anti-Semitic activity, but those events in and of themselves cannot explain the phenomenon away. We believe it was the way certain media covered the event that was the key factor.

As media outlets proliferate via satellite and 24/7 cable TV, the platform for spreading anti-Israel views and consequently anti-Semitism has increased exponentially. It is for that reason that it is critical to recognize that the vast majority of Europeans, and in fact, Americans, Latin Americans, Europeans and Arabs form their opinions about international affairs largely by what they see on television and to a lesser though important extent the Internet and newspapers. TIP's poll after poll confirms this phenomenon. Throughout the world today, wherever television watching is pervasive, family, universities and religious institutions all have a far lesser impact in forming opinions on the issues that so clearly impact on foreign policy views than in decades and centuries before. Clearly we are entering an era where increased vigilance with respect to the press as well as in the political and diplomatic arenas will necessarily take on a new urgent focus as Jews in Europe and around the world are facing increasing threats to their safety and way of life.

It is key for us to continually understand what we facing as we use our resources to help. To brief you on anti-Semitism in Europe today I am pleased to introduce you to TIP's New Director of European Affairs Christoph Heil. Christoph is a veteran TIP staffer who has worked with us as a German Associate for more than 3 years in both Washington DC and now in Jerusalem. Christoph, a native of Germany, has spent much of his time during the last three years initiating programs in London, Paris, Berlin, Brussels and Vienna where we educate top-tier European journalists and those based there from other countries including the Arab world as well as Parliamentarians and policy makers on Israel's strategic challenges on her borders and the threat of Iran.

After Christoph's remarks we will both be available to answer your questions...Christoph...

### **CHRISTOPH HEIL, DIRECTOR OF EUROPEAN AFFAIRS:**

Thank you very much, Laura.

I'd like to continue with a few words about the state of affairs in the major European countries. And about what's their political leaders' position on Israel. And then I'll talk about recent anti-Semitic incidents in Europe. As Laura said, a big portion of anti-Semitism stems from bad images in the media. If the political leaders support Israel publicly, Israel's image improves. A bad image of Israel in the news harms not only Israel, but also the Jewish communities in Europe. When Zionism as Jewish national self-determination is portrayed in Europe as hate and racism, Jews in Europe are turned - unfortunately - into a punching bag.

## FRANCE

In France for example, President Sarkozy's popularity fell to a record low this month. If an election were held today he would likely lose. Like other European countries, France is in serious economic troubles which they are trying to bolster with tremendous cuts in government budgets. The response to an increase in the retirement age from 60 to 62 last month filled the streets in France with 2 million protesters challenging law enforcement.

Meanwhile, Sarkozy does care about Israel. For Sarkozy, the existence and the security of the State of Israel are not negotiable. He once said he wouldn't shake hands with people who refuse to recognize Israel. On another opportunity, he said "Israel introduces diversity and democracy to the Middle East." He said: "It's a miracle that after millions of Jews were murdered, such a state has been able to arise."

However, there are an estimated six million Muslims living in France today - but there are only about 600,000 Jews. That means, a politician may think twice about which community he is reaching out to, because – sadly- politicians tend to care about being reelected than about anything else.

So, it's not a surprise that Sarkozy was shocked when Israel's Foreign Minister Lieberman questioned the loyalty of Israeli Arabs to the Jewish state and suggesting some of their towns be ceded to Palestinian jurisdiction in exchange for Jewish settlements in the West Bank. And during Netanyahu's visit to Paris recently, Sarkozy urged Netanyahu to fire Lieberman as his foreign minister.

But Sarkozy, despite all that is on his plate, he has offered to host peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians in Paris. But nothing is going on right now. Sarkozy's foreign policy agenda is dominated by other issues, such as France's presidency of the next G20 in Seoul. Today, China's president Hu Jintao is about to arrive for a three-day visit to Paris. And Sarkozy wants to win Chinese support for his agenda – the Middle East is not really on his radar for the moment.

On Iran, France is supporting sanctions against Iran, while the door to dialogue with the Iranian regime remains open. The EU3 (France, Britain and Germany) offered Iran a new round of talks about its nuclear program, the talks are set to take place in Geneva later this month. The dates are not confirmed yet, so we have to see.

As I said before, there are an estimated six million Muslims living in France today. 30% of children under the age of 20 in France are Muslims. The ratio in Paris and Marseille has soared to even 45%. Today, there are more mosques in southern France than churches. This situation may be at least part of the reason for the hatred against Israel – it's due to the corresponding rise in the country's Islamic population.

Meanwhile, the following has happened to Jews:

Anti-Semitism in France is strongly on the rise, according a report from 2009, 832 anti-Semitic incidents were recorded in France, as compared with 474 such incidents in 2008 - a 75% increase. The French population's anger at Israel can be attributed to its counter-terrorist operation Cast Lead, the Goldstone report and the Gaza flotilla. Anti-Semitic words and deeds, often under the cover of anti-Zionism, have become a major and worryingly fact of life. Just last Friday night, 49 Jewish gravestones were smashed in France.

The main pro-Israel players in France are the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF), The Jewish Federation of France and the France Israel Association. We are now in the process of reaching out more to partner organizations and setting up political meetings as well whenever we do media tours in France with Israeli experts. We'd like to strengthen these relationships and use them even more for our activities in France – but I'll talk more about our goals later.

Our last polling shows that the situation in France is still stable with – surprisingly - some Islamic pullback. Since 2009 there was a rise in cool feelings for the Palestinians, but this trend may rather reflect feelings toward Muslim riots within France – not the developments in Israel. Support for Israel among the French public is steady at about 16 percent.

UK

In England, newly elected Prime Minister Cameron is still in his political honeymoon. This week, Cameron and Sarkozy signed a 50-year treaty to facilitate closer co-operation between their countries' armed forces and on their nuclear deterrents. Cameron seems to be more friendly to Israel than his foreign minister William Hague. Hague met yesterday with Palestinians who demonstrate weekly against Israel's separation barrier near Ramallah in the West Bank. Hague supported the idea of a nonviolent protest against the fence. His prime minister, Cameron's position on Israel hasn't changed since his forerunner Gordon Brown left off: He says Israel is entitled to security, defensible borders, but it has to fulfill international laws.

What is striking are the attempts of boycott and deligitimization that stem from the UK. British academia led the attempt at academic boycott of Israeli scholars, which was later called off. In Britain, the trade unions joined together to impose boycotts on Israeli products. And in Britain, neither the previous nor the current government has garnered yet the strength to prevent the abuse of universal law. The law in Britain enables visiting Israelis and other foreigners to be arrested and tried for alleged war crimes. Israel said yesterday it was postponing all strategic dialogue with the UK until it changes in its so called "universal jurisdiction" legislation. The UK has been dragging its feet over amending the law. Just this week, Israel's Minister Dan Meridor

canceled his trip to London for fear of arrest for his involvement in the interception of the Gaza flotilla in May. Talks on this issue continue, but in the meantime, the UK is not a safe destination for Israeli leaders.

Presently, there are over 1,000 mosques throughout Great Britain, many of which were converted from churches. The most popular boy's name in the country is Mohammed.

Our polls from May this year show that 14% have warm feelings for Israel, and 40% cold feelings for Israel. And for the Palestinians they show 24% warm feelings, and 28% cold feelings.

## GERMANY

In Germany, Chancellor Merkel's coalition has suffered a sharp erosion in public backing over the last. No post-war government in Germany has lost so much public support so quickly. Merkel's center-right coalition won the 2009 federal vote with a combined 48 percent. But last month, they have fallen to 35 percent.

Since the establishment of relations between Germany and Israel, the security of Israel has been a "cornerstone" of German foreign policy. However, there is a growing desire in Germany to (as they call it) "criticize" Israel. While German parliamentarians like to talk about their close friendship with Israel, they released an unprecedented anti-Israel parliamentary resolution this summer, supported by all parties that urged Israel "to [quote] support the demand for an international investigation of the operation against the Gaza flotilla." The resolution further criticized Israel for "violating the principle of proportionality" by employing violence against the activists aboard the Mavi Marmara. The German parliament was criticized heavily by pro-Israeli organizations in Germany and is now preparing a resolution calling on the immediate release of Gilad Shalit.

There are 4 million Muslims living in Germany (5% of the population), 2 million are German citizens. Last month, Merkel said that Germany has failed to grasp how Muslim immigration has transformed their country and will have to come to terms with more mosques throughout the country. The Chancellor's remarks represent the first official acknowledgement that Germany, like other European countries, is destined to become a stronghold of Islam. A new German political party, (The Freedom), had its inaugural meeting last week in Berlin. The political party resists Islamization and supports Israel, however, like in other countries (Netherlands) the line between resistance against Islamization and incitement against Islam is very thin – and we have to be careful here.

Since the beginning of the second intifada, there have been many cases in which Jews and Israelis suffered attacks in Germany, usually at the hands of young Arabs or Turks. The German police have failed to apprehend any of the assailants until now. Jewish cemeteries are being defaced with swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti. A serious anti-Semitic assault took place in Berlin last week, when an Israeli medical student was attacked at night by a group of young women after they heard her talking in Hebrew on her cell phone. The Israeli woman was beaten and wounded.

A new poll conducted by a political foundation with close ties to the German social democratic party shows that 17% of Germans believe Jews have 'too much influence'.

Other voices proclaim that “bigotry towards Muslims is the new anti-Semitism.”

## RECENT INCIDENTS

But not only in these 3 major European countries, Jewish communities all over Europe are facing a situation where they are being physically, verbally and psychologically threatened by fundamentalist elements and their extreme left-wing cohorts on one side and the far-right neo-Nazis on the other.

Budapest, the capital of Hungary, is experiencing a rebirth of anti-Semitism. The far-right party (Jobbik) is now the country's third largest party and Jews are being openly intimidated.

In Holland, a government-funded Catholic school hosted a ‘Palestine Day’, which was replete with anti-Semitic references and activities for youngsters. One stall at the event was titled “Throw the soldiers into the sea” where children were invited to throw replicas of Jewish and Israeli soldiers into two large tanks.

In Poland, anti-Semitic posters and slogans were shown during a soccer game.

In Sweden, an event organized for Jewish children in Malmo, was attacked by a gang of thugs who shouted anti-Semitic slogans. The gang entered the area hosting the children’s event and damaged property.

Earlier in this year after a surge of anti-Semitism hit the Jewish community in the city of Malmo, Sweden, the city's mayor considered this an “understandable consequence” of the Israel-Palestinian conflict and claimed [quote] “we accept neither Zionism nor anti-Semitism,” equating Jewish national self-determination with hate and racism.

In recent months, public figures in Europe have made anti-Semitic comments. (Thilo Sarrazin, Germany’s former board member of the German central Bank, the European Commissioner for Trade, Karel de Gucht, and Emilio Menendez del Valle, Spanish MEP.

In Spain, the results of a recent government-funded anti-Semitism poll proved to be an effort to address the phenomenon in the country by simply pretending it doesn’t exist. Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos presented results of the first sociological study on anti-Semitism in Spain saying: “Public opinion in Spain is not anti-Semitic”.

Other Jewish studies, in contrast, have repeatedly drawn attention to anti-Semitism in Spain, showing highly negative opinions of Jews. Among university students in Spain that figure is 62%. The statement “Jews use the memory of the Holocaust to their benefit” is viewed positively by 54%. Only one-third of Spaniards disagree with these anti-Semitic statements. Not surprisingly, the Spanish newspaper El Mundo reported shortly after the study’s release that “one-third of Spaniards are anti-Semitic because of Israeli policy.” What it has done, is minimize the problem and “normalize” it using a poor justification – the problem stems from Israel and “its policies.”

## TIP's GOALS

Here are a few of our goals for next year:

First of all, we'd like to continue what we've been doing: bringing experts from Israel to interviews and briefings with editors and policy makers in France, Germany and the UK. Editors and politicians are telling us that they are lacking first hand information about Israel and that they need more facts from pro-Israel spokespeople. We would like to do more of these and we have a couple of amazing, excellent speakers lined up for next year.

Then, we'd like to recruit a small pool of activists in France, Germany and the UK and give them media training using our message guides written by Frank Luntz. In a second step then, we'd like to provide them with accurate and up-to-date information about Israel that they could pitch to the media - on a regular basis – not on behalf of the Israel Project, but as spokespeople of their own Pro-Israel groups in their own countries.

I thank you for your patience and I'd be happy to answer your questions if there are any.

Thank you very much.