

LECTURE

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ANTI-SEMITISM IN MODERN GERMANY : DO WE MEET OUR HISTORIC RESPONSIBILITY?

- Bucharest, May 23, 2013 -

Anti-Semitism is unique among the hatreds in the world in a combination of four aspects: 1) Longevity – it has existed for a long time, 2) Universality – it exists almost everywhere in the world, 3) Intensity – it is expressed in a virtually aggressive manner, 4) Confusion – there is surprisingly little agreement on why people hate Jews.

Historians offer many “reasons” to explain why people are anti-Semitic. The motive can be religious, nationalistic, social Darwinist or racist. What anti-Semites have in common is that they attribute certain negative clichés or stereotypes to Jews. Jews are described as pacifistic or warmongers, capitalist exploiters or revolutionary communists, as the “killers” of Jesus. From a rational point of view these “reasons” have one thing in common – they have nothing to do with being Jewish. But stereotypes and clichés can be instrumentalised and if they fall on fertile ground they can lead to discrimination or social exclusion.

Or worse: to an ideology that outspokenly promoted the physical extermination of Jews. As this ideology was written and applied in Germany with the still unbelievable result that more than six million Jews were murdered, as a German I accept that my country has a special responsibility to combat anti-Semitism with vigour and determination.

In my short introductory speech I could provide you with a few statistical data from a survey about anti-Semitism in Germany and other countries. In fact there are many and I will now have the chance to go more into details. And I can propound what has been done in Germany in the past to combat anti-Semitism and which strategies we apply today or plan to apply in the future.

In my introductory speech I referred to a study which was conducted by the American Anti-Defamation league in 2012. But what is the trend like in Germany or other European countries? ADL had conducted a similar study already in 2009. Then people had also been asked whether they believed that it is “probably true” that

- 1) Jews are more loyal to Israel than to this country
- 2) Jews have too much power in the business world
- 3) Jews have too much power in the international financial markets
- 4) Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust

In Germany in 2009 20 % of those surveyed believe that at least three of the above statements are “probably true”, in 2012 the figure was 21 %, a slight increase.

Let me put these data into a European context:

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In Austria the corresponding figures were 30 % in 2009, 28 % in 2012, France 20% in 2009, 24 % in 2012, Hungary 47 % in 2009, 63 % in 2012, Poland 48 % both in 2009 and 2012, Spain 48 % in 2009, 53 % in 2012, United Kingdom 10% in 2009, 17 % in 2012.

In 2012 this survey was also conducted in the Netherlands, where the figure was 10 %, and in Norway where it was 16 %.

It is noteworthy that for the most part, those over the age of 65m those who did not continue their education beyond the age of 17 and those earning less than € 11,000 per year are more likely than the rest of the population to agree with at least three of the four anti-Semitic characterizations presented in the survey.

However, we see that with the exception of Austria anti-Semitic attitudes are on the rise in many European countries.

How was the long-term trend in Germany? We have few long-term-studies, one of the them is the so-called "Bielefelder Studie" which was conducted for the first time in 2002. Also in this study people were asked whether they fully or predominantly agreed with certain statements.

Let me give you three examples:

The statement "Jews have too much influence in Germany" was agreed to by 20.7 % of respondents in 2002 and by 16.5 % in 2010.

The statement "Through their behaviour Jews are partly guilty in the persecution against them" was agreed to by 16.6. % in 2002 and by 12.6 % in 2010.

The statement "Many Jews try to take advantage of the crimes that were directed against them during the Nazi era" was agreed to by 51.1% in 2002 and by 39.5 % in 2010.

These data cannot satisfy but they show a positive long-term trend. I must, however,

not forget that we had even slightly lower figures between 2006 and 2009.

I also have to mention that more than one third of the respondents through all the years expressed comprehension for anti-Jewish attitudes in the face of Israel's policy concerning the West Bank and the Palestinians. You find similar results in other European countries. I know that the objective of Israel's foreign and domestic policies is not to win "popularity contest" but to guarantee the safety of the State of Israel but if I were Israeli I would probably think about how Israel can improve the perception of her policies.

Anti-semitic attitudes can be concealed, they can be expressed in ways that do not contradict the law or they can result in crime.

Let me provide you with a few data on crime trends in Germany.

In 2001 1,691 anti-Semiticly motivated crimes were reported to the police, in 2010 the figure was 1,192 and in 2012 865 – an encouraging trend.

Most of the reported crimes can be classified as "Hate Speech" or the perpetrators daubed wall or grave stones with anti-Semitic slogans or symbols. But there were also several arson attacks against synagogues.

How about anti-Semiticly motivated crimes in which physical violence was involved? In 2001 28 such cases were reported,, the highest number between 2001 and 2013 was in reported in 2007 with 64 cases, in 2012 the figure was 27.

In 2012 there were 417 suspects, 21 victims got injured, fortunately no-one got killed.

The "typical perpetrator" is male, under the age of 30 and holds right-wing extremist views.

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There are regional differences, for example there is a comparatively high number of crimes in the state of Brandenburg, in which organized right-wing extremists live in a comparatively higher number than in other states.

If we want to combat anti-Semitism successfully we must know where we can encounter this phenomenon.

As such we have identified:

- Families
- Schools, especially discussions during breaks in schoolyards
- Youth clubs
- Pubs
- Fairs and festivals
- Football stadiums
- Letters to the Editor of Newspapers
- Churches and Mosques
- Memorials and Educational Institutions
- Discussions with Jews
- Discussions among peers about Jews in their absence

If I do not mention the political sector this is because there is a consensus among the democratic parties that anti-Semitic attitudes or remarks will not be tolerated. All democratic parties condemn anti-Semitism and stress that they determinedly fight it. So a single anti-Semitic remark by a German politician will mean the automatic end of his career and an excuse will not prevent this. The last scandal we had was in 2003 when a CDU Member of Parliament in the context of a speech made remarks that were perceived as anti-Semitic. He was expelled from the party.

In which media can we find anti-Semitic attitudes? These are

- the right-wing extremist press
- in the section "Letters to the editor" in the democratic press
- the Internet
- in blogs
- in Social Networks
- in Sermons and religious instructions - in this context I do not refer to the two big Christian Churches in Germany.

So we know where we have to act.

Anti-Semitic attitudes are very often handed down in families but the state cannot and must not control what is discussed in family circles.

So we must focus on nursery schools, schools, educational institutions, universities, churches, clubs and associations. I will give you a few examples.

We know a case in which right-wing extremist parents tried to become members of the advisory board of a nursery school intending to have a right-wing extremist nursery school teacher employed. This could be prevented and will be prevented by guidelines that were issued after this incident.

Schools are also in the focus of right-wing extremists. They disseminate thousands of CDs with right-wing extremist music for free, however they have double-checked that the text of the songs is not a criminal offense. Because of lack of money the number of distributed CDs has fortunately decreased since 2005.

The Israeli-German School Book Commission had demanded for a long time that Jewish history should not only be taught in the context of the Nazi era and the Holocaust. Here we had deficits for a long time. But in 2008 the German Bundestag passed a resolution in which it demanded to intensify the combat against anti-Semitism and to promote Jewish life in Germany, the Länder revised the curricula. Today the issues "Jewish life", and "Israel today" "Jewish history" are covered in the school subjects religion, ethics, politics and history. New teaching materials were developed partly in cooperation with the OSCE and the Anne Frank House. Of course this is not at the expense of the coverage of the Nazi era and the Holocaust. I would like to mention that it has proved counterproductive if teachers expect from school children the expression of a feeling of guilt when they are confronted with the Holocaust, it can lead to secondary anti-Semitism, which refers to an anti-Semitism that is motivated by the deflection of guilt. The use of Nazi propaganda material in school education

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requires that teachers are adequately trained to put across the perfidy of this material. It is noteworthy that many schools cooperate with memorials in Germany, Jewish communities and that there exists a network "Schools without racism –schools with courage" which comprises more than 1.000 schools with more than 750.000 pupils.

We have few studies about anti-Semitism at German universities. Anti-Semitic remarks or publications by university professors would not be tolerated but we do for example not know how many students mix up a critical attitude towards Israel with anti-Semitic stereotypes.

Anti-Semitism in the past very often was religiously motivated but for a long time the two big Christian Churches have opposed anti-Semitism determinedly. Schoolbooks for religious education condemn anti-Semitic stereotypes and attitudes. Since 1952 we have had the annual National Brotherhood Week during which the Christian-Jewish dialogue is organized in many events. Today there are hundreds of smaller and bigger projects that promote a dialogue between Christians and Jews and that combat anti-Semitism. Youth groups and candidates for confirmation visit memorials, and on the 9th November in many churches there are services to commemorate the 9th of November 1938 on which more than 1,400 synagogues were destroyed in Germany.

The German Football Association condemns all forms of racism and discrimination, organizes many projects with football fans and annually awards the Julius-Hirsch-Prize to commemorate this football player who played for Germany and was murdered by the Nazis. However, the more than 30 Jewish Makkabi Football clubs that exist in Germany have been complaining for a long time about anti-Semitic slogans and chanting. Surveillance of stadiums and a lot of projects to ban all forms of discrimination have improved the situation in the stadiums, as an example I mention the project "Eleven questions after 90 minutes" organized by the Alliance for Democracy and Tol-

erance" or the project "Stay on the ball - Football against Racism and Discrimination" organized by the German Sport Youth. We know, however, that small clubs that are less controlled by the German Football Association still have problems and that there are still incidents when fans walk from the railway station to the stadium or back to the railway station. In this context there is still a lot of work ahead of us.

The German Fire Brigade Association has 1.3 million members, its youth organization 240,000. This youth organization has a nationwide project "Youth Fire brigades for Democracy" to fight right-wing extremist, xenophobic or anti-Semitic attitudes. Since 2010 seminars have been organized to train functionaries how right-wing extremism can be fought, a handbook was published to give assistance in the handling of discrimination, exclusion, prejudice, right-wing violence, proverbs, jokes and heterosexual remarks. On the 12th June 2010 the general Assembly of the German Youth Fire Brigade passed a resolution that states that the Youth Fire Brigade stands for courage, helpfulness and democracy. They shape a community in which diversity and pluralism are respected. Discrimination is in contradiction to the concept of diversity. Therefore anti-democratic agitation is incompatible with a membership in the Fire brigade.

Anti-Semitic remarks and opinions will be found in the right-wing extremist press but not in the German quality press. However, there is a study on TV coverage of the Middle East Conflict by German TV channels which comes to the conclusion that the word coverage had been correct and predominantly neutral but the visual coverage had not. It showed primarily firing Israeli tanks and soldiers and Palestinian victims. This study, however, dates back to the year 2002.

It still happens both in electronic and print media that for example successful businesspeople are presented as "the Jewish entrepreneur N.N.". This also hands down stereotypes. You will never hear someone to be described as "the Christian entrepreneur".

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We all use the internet and many of us use social networks. And we know that there are thousands of websites with right-wing-extremist or anti-Semitic content. This is difficult to control. However, the initiative "jugendschutz.net" in cooperation with the Federal Office for Political Education writes to providers and informs them about racist or anti-Semitic content and asks them to remove them. They claim that their success rate is 80 %. You can still watch films like "Jud Süß" on You Tube, but at least you are warned that the film is insulting and inadequate. Ebay tries to prevent the trading of Nazi devotionalia.

A problem is represented by certain Islamist newspapers, publications and websites. They are often anti-Semitic - principally through hostility towards Israel.

Many German newspapers monitor the blogs on their websites and delete them if they are openly racist or anti-Semitic. I must, however admit, that I am sometimes shocked by the stupidity of some of the comments that remain and that reflect concealed racist, extremist or anti-Semitic attitudes.

Therefore programs to promote democratic culture are of high importance. When in the 90s the Government detected a rise in xenophobia and right-wing extremism it launched the "Action Program against Aggressiveness and Violence". But this program only focussed on aggressive youngster and was therefore criticised for ignoring the societal dimension of the problem.

Therefore in 2000 a new program was launched under the motto "Action Program Youth for Tolerance and Democracy, against right-wing Extremism, Xenophobia and anti-Semitism" which to a higher degree involved civil society.. It had three sub programs: (i) CIVITAS to fight right-wing extremism in the new Länder. In this context counselling centres and mobile intervention teams were established, civil society structures were strengthened, (ii) "Entimon – together against Violence and right-wing Extremism" was a project for the whole federal republic and promoted local networks,

intercultural learning, and political education. It was co-financed by the Länder and by many municipalities, (iii) "XENOS – Live and work in diversity", aimed at the labour market with activities against racism and discrimination.

Altogether the federal government financed more than 4,500 projects and invested 192 million €.

The follow-up project for XENOS were the projects "DIVERSITY IS GOOD – Youth for Diversity, Tolerance and Democracy" and "XENOS – Integration and Diversity" which is still running There is also a special program that assists right-wing extremists who are willing to leave their environment.

Many Länder have similar programs, for example in Berlin the State Program against right-wing extremism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, in Rhineland-Palatinate the "Network against right-wing Extremism", in Hesse the "Network Mobile Intervention against right-wing Extremism", in Bremen the project "Youth for Democracy, Human Rights, and Tolerance- against Racism and Xenophobia", the "Network against right-wing Extremism" in the Saarland, the initiative "Tolerant Brandenburg", the initiative "Cosmopolitan Saxonia for Democracy and Tolerance", in Mecklenburg Pre-Pomerania there is the project "Together we strengthen Democracy and Tolerance", and in Thuringia the State program for Democracy, Tolerance and World-Openness.

The Association of German Municipalities identified 90 regions that need special assistance, 60 in the new and 30 in the old Länder, and coordination offices and local action plans were set up in these areas.

Furthermore since 2007 more than 90 projects run by NGOs were financially supported and I am very happy that the Managing Director of one of them, Ms Rebecca Weiss is with us today.

The Anne Frank House Berlin has developed new teaching material, the Education Centre HATIKVA in Saxonia focuses on educational disputes with perpetrators, there is a pro-

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ject in Berlin against anti-Semitism for young Muslims, the initiative "Likrat"–Likrat is Hebrew and means "in encounter", training young Jews in seminars, they then become Likratinos and work as peer educators in schools - and the Initiative "Change of Perspective – Initiatives against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia" trains educational personnel.

Furthermore the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance acknowledges that the German authorities have adopted a wide range of measures aimed at fighting right-wing extremist crimes, including anti-Semitic crimes. Perpetrators are pursued and brought to justice where possible.

So do we have reason to be happy? Does Germany meet her historic obligations?

On the one hand Germany has always faced its past, and racism and anti-Semitism are condemned by all democratic political parties. No politician can dare to make anti-Semitic remarks in public, we have a broad alliance in civil society that combats racism and anti-Semitism.

We are more successful in combating anti-Semitism than other countries but there are others that are better so we are not successful enough. We must continue and intensify our efforts.

This is best done not only at national level, but in cooperation with European partners who are confronted with similar problems.

Let me conclude with two quotations. The first one stems from the diary of Anne Frank, it is from an entry which she made on the 11th April, 1944.

"Who has made us Jews different from all other people? Who has allowed us to suffer so terribly up until now? It is God who has made us as we are, but it will be God, too who will raise us up again. Who knows it might even be our religion from which the world and all peoples learn good, and for that reason do we suffer. We can never become just Netherlanders or just English or

representatives of other countries for that matter. We will always remain Jews."

The second one is from the French philosopher René Descartes who gives the answer to the question why hatred is so widespread.:

"It is easy to hate and it is difficult to love. This is how the whole scheme of things work. All good things are difficult to achieve and bad things are very easy to get."

Yes, a world without hatred, prejudice and discrimination, a world without racism and anti-Semitism is – if ever- difficult to achieve, But it's worth every effort.