David MEYER

Rabbi and Professor of Rabbinic Literature at the Gregorian Pontifical University

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I would like first of all to thank all of you for asking me to testify in front of this committee and to offer me the opportunity to share with you my experiences of anti-Semitism in Europe as well as my understanding of the nature of the renewed threat of European anti-Semitism. As a rabbi based in Brussels, at the heart of Europe, carrying both a French and Israeli citizenship, I have witnessed and experienced the reality of being a Jew in Western Europe. I was born and raised in Paris, I lived in France for many years, I have served as a rabbi in both the United Kingdom and in Brussels; I am currently a professor of rabbinic literature at the Gregorian Pontifical university in Rome as well as at the University of Leuven in Belgium. So between France, Belgium, England and Italy, I believe that my experiences as a Jewish religious leader in these countries has given me a perspective on the current state of anti-Semitism in Europe.

My first encounter with the reality of anti-Semitism happened in 1980. In October of that year, as a young boy about to become a Bar Mitzvah, I found myself on a Friday night in synagogue. This particular synagogue was in central Paris – known as the Synagogue Copernic. Towards the end of the service, a bomb suddenly exploded just outside the doors; when the panic and confusion subsided, four people had lost their lives – one, a woman entering the synagogue and three others who were passing by. At almost 13, prior to this day, I could never have been able to imagine that as a Jew I could be targeted in such a way. In the hours following the bombing, the Jewish community heard the expected reactions, linking such an act of Jewish hatred to the never-ending conflict in the Middle East. What was not expected, however, and far more shocking, were the words of the then Prime Minister, Raymond Barre. In front of the nation, the Prime Minister deplored the attack on the synagogue and expressed condolences to the victims and their families, but then went further and made sure to specify that "this horrendous attack was aimed at the Jewish community but it is finally innocent French citizens that were mostly the victims". Even to a young and naïve boy, it did not take long to truly understand the meaning of these words. It was clear – the Jew entering the synagogue was not innocent whereas the people passing by were. From that day, more then 33 years ago, I have learnt and never forgotten that many in Europe could never see me as a citizen like any other.

Many years after the bombing in Paris and by then an ordained Rabbi, I was once again profoundly shaken. I was honoured when I was invited as a guest speaker in front of one of the military sub-commission of the French Senate in Paris. The topic I was asked to address was "the impact of the Middle East conflict in European societies". As one does under such circumstances, I started to briefly present myself: as a rabbi, with dual citizenship (French and Israeli), having lived and worked in four different western European countries, widely published on both Jewish and Israeli issues in respected national newspapers. In so doing, I had believed that I was presenting my "credentials" - seeking to establish in my own way some from of credibility that would allow me to present to such a forum, my view on such an important topic. To my audience, however, I had done just the opposite. Certain members of this commission, who questioned the legitimacy of my dual citizenship, abruptly interrupted me. Not only were my credentials to speak before the commission deemed unsuitable, but my very loyalty to France was called into question and I was told very bluntly to "return to my country" – clearly the

reference being Israel. As a Jew, claiming and affirming a deep relationship with Israel, in the eyes of this commission, I could not be a loyal citizen of France and that clearly I did not have a place among them.

I could certainly carry on with more examples. I could tell you how a high official in England once very rationally explained to me (ironically during a discussion on interfaith dialogue) why as Jews we should never forget that we were only a "tolerated minority" in the country. By "tolerated" I can only assume that as humans, we were not equal. But going on with my personal examples would be to miss the point of my testimony today. My experiences of anti-Semitism have certainly wounded me and affected my views on my own personal future as a Jew in Europe but yet, they pale in comparison to the violence that has been inflicted to others within the Jewish community. How not to think of the sheer horror that was inflicted on a small Jewish school, in March of 2012 in Toulouse? There, a radical young French Muslim killed, in cold blood, three Jewish children aged 3, 6 and 8 as well as a rabbi; a teacher and a father of one of the victims. In Synagogues across Europe and in Jewish community centres, who can say today that we do not have a moment of hesitation and fear as we enter the doors and pass through guards and security? How not to mention as well the never-ending cases where the Holocaust is both denied and in the same breath (and often by the same leaders) deemed not to have gone far enough. The memory of the Holocaust has now become in Europe a theme of division. As a father, how can I not look at my daughters without a mix of fear and apprehension about what Jewish life in Europe will be, for not only them, but also for their own children?

But is this a new reality to Europe? There is no denying that Europe has never been kind to its Jewish population and we can evoke unspeakable horror. Yet, what is new is that after a period of roughly 50 years following the second world war and the Holocaust, during which anti-Semitism - it was believed and hope – had ceased, we see and witness again renewed expression and acts of Jewish hatred in the public domain. We again see tragedies, we again see physical attacks on Jews whose only crime is to be Jewish, we see and hear verbal expressions of hatred against Jews and Judaism and we again see attacks on Jewish institutions and synagogues. Clearly, this is an upsetting trend and is deeply troubling.

Of course, many leaders in Europe are committed to fighting this renewal of anti-Semitic expression and violence. In France in particular, we have been fortunate to have had and continue to have courageous Presidents, one after the other, both from the right and from the left, clearly affirming that the fight against anti-Semitism was and is a national priority. In Germany as well, political leaders have been for many years now in the forefront of this fight against the resurgence of anti-Semitism. The words, in this respect, have been right, the speeches moving and the tone solemn. But anti-Semitism remains on the rise. Jewish communities are more and more fearsome for their own security and the physical safety of individual Jews is once again an issue. So beyond the words of condemnation that are heard after tragedies, beyond the words of comfort to the victims and their families, have our political leaders done what is necessary? The uncomfortable truth is that, whatever the words of politicians in Europe, it is somehow accepted for Jews to be targeted. There is a

level of "tolerance" to acts of violence against the Jewish community that is profoundly disturbing.

I believe that in order to try to understand why a certain level of anti-Semitism remains "tolerated", one needs to dig deeper into our analysis of anti-Semitism in Europe. There is no doubt that many of the violent acts of anti-Semitism in recent years has been at the hands of a radicalised youth, from Muslim backgrounds often marginalised and influenced by their religious preachers and leaders. Often the acts of violence are linked to the conflict in the Middle East and what is racist violence against Jews is often masked as frustration against Israel. We are all aware that for these people, "anti-Zionism" is but a code word for "anti-Semitism". Of course it is impossible to understand what went through the mind of Mohamed Merah as he shot dead Jewish children in Toulouse last year but it is not a stretch to say that the Israeli conflict was probably not what made him put a bullet through the brains of these innocent children. At this first level, many in the Jewish community believe – and they are right - that as long as this link to the conflict in the Middle East is tolerated, as long as a radical form of violent Islam is tolerated, as long as virulent calls to delegitimize the very existence of Israel is tolerated, anti-Semitism will also somehow be tolerated because as Jews, whether or not we carry an dual citizenship as I do, our link with Israel is deep, real and enduring.

Yet, anti-Semitism in Europe is not limited to these radical groups and this specific brand of anti-Semitism alone. A second level of anti-Semitism operates and thrives in the shadow of the first, one feeding from the other. It is a form of anti-Semitism that runs deep through the veins of European society – through its universities, leaders, policy makers and decision makers and politicians both from the far right to the radical left. It is the result of an old European mentality that has never really accepted the place of not only Jews as individuals but also of Judaism as a religion in its midst and that thrives in any historical moment of turmoil and economic difficulty. A situation and a reality that enables some level of anti-Semitism to remain "tolerated" within many European societies. One could hope that through education, perhaps even peace in the Middle East, the first level of anti-Semitism could, in some utopic future be eradicated. With this second level of anti-Semitism however, if the horrors of the Holocaust have not dampened it and it has not only survived but thrives in Europe today, not even the most naïve form of hope seems to be on the horizon. As Jews, we have very good reason to worry.

It is with great anxiety that over the last decade we have witnessed how this "old European based feeling of anti-Semitism" morphs into a new form of expression of rejection of Jews and Judaism. It has taken the form of proposed legislations that seek to outlaw Jewish practices and rituals. Recently, in Germany, a court attempted to ban circumcision as a barbaric practice contrary to European understanding of human rights and insinuating that such a Jewish practice is not "equal" to "proper" European customs. The idea spread within weeks to its neighbours, notably Switzerland and Austria. Many, in intellectual and university circles have been receptive and sympathetic to these arguments. This current situation raises an important question for Europe. The wording of the ruling makes it clear and states that the "irreversible bodily harm" thus imposed on the child without his consent is illegal. This, the court argues, amounts to a crime and a breach of the European

charter of human rights as it exposes the infant to "potential physical dangers" for no other reason then the religious conviction of his parents. One could easily extrapolate from there that the same conclusions could be reached regarding not just circumcision but the very notion of Jewish identity. Most Jews are simply born Jewish, without any form of choice. In light of European Jewish history, where the very act of being Jewish was enough to bring death and violence, one could then argue that being born from a Jewish mother could very well expose the child - without his consent - to "potential physically dangers". By over-emphasising the rights of the child and the constant need for "consent", the German judges are setting themselves on a colliding path with Jewish identity, "choice-less" in its nature. Thus, the real issue is a philosophical one. Does Europe, in its own system of thought, leave a place for a tradition like ours based on a "choice-less" identity? The question is daunting. The "choice-less" reality of Jewish existence shatters many aspects of contemporary European thinking and is therefore not a stretch of the imagination to foresee a potential clash of deep philosophical values between Europe and its Jews.

As a Jew, as a rabbi having spent a great deal of time studying Jewish European history, the current state of anti-Semitism leads me to some simple observations with which I would like to conclude. The first one is the realization that what hurts the most in Europe today is the knowledge that behind these various attempts at undermining the legality of Jewish practices, lies the widely held view that even after 2000 years of attested Jewish life in Europe we are still perceived as a foreign tribe recently landed on the European continent.

The second observation is specifically linked to the "legal" nature of this new anti-Semitism. As worrisome as the "street noises", it is through legislation that some in Europe are attempting to give a cloak of "respectability" to its anti-Semitism. The memory of the past century should make it crystal clear that legal proceedings against Judaism and its practices does not stop with attacks on religious practices. It inevitably ends with attacks against Jews.

Thirdly, that Europe should learn to come to terms with the emotional bond many Jews have to Israel. As Jews, we do have deep emotional feelings for the State of Israel that goes well beyond the rigorous criticism of Israel's policies that is at time needed. As such, systematic diabolisation of Israel will always end with a diabilisation of the Jews and to anti-Semitic violence.

It is my view that what Europe needs to do in order to truly fight anti-Semitism is to truly accept and not just tolerate its own Jewish populations. To value Judaism and Jewish communities in Europe cannot be limited to words of comfort when tragedy strikes. It requires much more then that. Our leaders need to show a real interest in Judaism and to do so publically. An interest that would not simply be the expression of a "devotion" to the mythical image of the Jews, remnant from the past that once contributed to the make-up of Europe and its culture and later almost exterminated from Europe. But rather a genuine interest, because as a minority, even if very small in numbers, we are still contributing to making Europe what it is today and bringing a certain diversity of values and knowledge. Tolerating any level of anti-Semitic acts against Jews – either under the cover of anti-Zionism or less subtly, for just being

Jewish is a sign of a wider feeling of intolerance and hate within our society– not just against Judaism but against all citizens, of all faiths and threatens a return to those darkest years in Europe when those that were different were selected for death.