

The Educational Challenge of European Antisemitism

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We have had a great deal of excellent analyses of current anti-Semitism: global, Moslem, and more specifically, European, and the OSCE has met before to discuss how to combat the current wave of anti-Semitism, specifically in Europe. There is a growing consensus among analysts of the problem that, in Europe, we are dealing with three forms of the disease: one, the right-wing anti-Semitism of Neo-Nazis, skinheads, etc.; two, the anti-Semitism of a minority of radicalized, marginalized, frustrated, unemployed and non-integrated, largely second-generation immigrant Moslem youth, who follow radical Islamist teachers; three, the anti-Semitism of the so-called 'chattering classes', mainly some of the liberal-leftist intelligentsia and media. Up till now, the OSCE is committed to deal mainly with the first type, through legislation, activation of police and other security organizations, perpetual vigilance, and, which concerns us here above all, education. This is important but unfortunately insufficient. Rightist anti-Semitism results in violence, verbal, written, or physical, which is newsworthy, and can be dealt with by political forces. It is a dangerous phenomenon, and the OSCE deserves credit for its commitment to face it, but in the end, it is marginal. Racist anti-Semitism of the Nazi type is not the main danger.

To deal with Islamic radicals is largely politically incorrect, because we do not want to be accused of islamophobia. The background to this is the demographic catastrophe now facing Europe, as a result of a steep decline of the birth-rate in almost all European countries, from Russia to Spain. There will be many millions less Europeans in another 20-30 years, than today. There are now over 20 million Moslems in Europe, though from widely different regions of the Moslem world, with different traditions and attitudes, and in order to maintain its standard of living, an ageing population of Europeans will have to take in more Moslem immigrants, despite all the measures to limit immigration, and the high birth-rate of this population will add to the increasing numbers. There has been a failure in European countries to integrate these multitudes, the result being increasing Moslem alienation, disappointment and frustration. The anti-Semitic outrages are, to a not inconsiderable degree, a part of the rebellion of these youths, and their adult supporters, against their host societies. For historical, political and economic reasons, Israel and, by extension, local Jews are the easiest and most convenient scapegoats. The young people responsible for many of the anti-Jewish outrages are fired by radical Islam and its explicit demand to kill all Jews. The

trigger of their actions is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though their knowledge of that conflict is minimal. There, too the educational dimension is of central importance.

The anti-Semitism of the chattering classes cannot and should not be dealt with by governments and the democratic political world, because the right to freedom of even extreme expression of political opinion, which is a corner-stone of democracy, must be protected. This liberal intellectual anti-Semitism sees Israel as the collective Jew, and attacks its very existence behind the guise of an anti-Sharon stand; its treatment of the collective Jew today parallels closely the discriminatory treatment of the individual Jew in pre-emancipation times, but under the banner of a protection of human rights, of the perceived underdog and in the name of a liberal, egalitarian approach. Opposing the policies of the present Israeli government is of course perfectly legitimate – attacks on those policies in the outspoken Israeli media are in substance much harsher than the wild accusations and the nasty caricatures in some of the media. However, identifying Israel with Nazism, and regarding its establishment a historic mistake, as many of these people do, is another matter altogether, as mistakes have to be corrected, and the implication is that Israel, a member of the United Nations, should disappear – which is the content of the Hamas Charter - and the targets are the Jews of Israel, and by extension, Jews outside it. This is clearly an anti-Semitic, potentially genocidal, approach. Opposing this is the task of an educational effort that would present a balanced picture and place it within a democratic context.

We have to move beyond analysis, though, and see what works and what does not in educational attempts to counter these trends. Thus, for instance, showing anti-Semitic and radically anti-Israeli caricatures equating Israel with Nazism, identifying Jews everywhere with this supposedly neo-Nazi state, and getting furious at the anti-Semitic usage of Holocaust imagery, does not work very well. We expect students to get indignant about such equations – but they don't. At the historical base of European anti-Semitism lies the identification of the Jews with the devil, and the modern devil is Nazi Germany. If the Jews are the devil, are they not like the Nazis? Polls have shown that anti-Jewishness runs very deep in European historical consciousness, though I think that they also show that this attitude is largely latent, and may even be diminishing. It is a major error to view anti-Semitism as a prejudice – it isn't; it is part of the European cultural heritage, and we cannot fight it by repeating how great the Jewish contribution to European culture – Einstein, Freud, and so on – was.

Islam also has an anti-Semitic heritage, on which present-day radical Islam builds. The Koran contains passages in which Jews are called apes, and they are accused of radical iniquities, but there are also passages of a positive attitude to Jews. Historically, there were persecutions and pogroms in Moslem countries, such as Morocco, Yemen, and elsewhere, as well; but there were also eras, here in Spain as we all know, in which Jewish culture prospered in a Moslem civilization, the most advanced of its time.

We have to devise educational action against anti-Semitism within this complicated context. The slogan that anti-Semitism attacks the Jews first, and then the others, is undoubtedly correct, but stated like that it is a sermon, and moral sermonizing is ineffective. First of all, we should definitely link the educational struggle against anti-Semitism with the educational struggle against islamophobia. Islamophobia is based not just on opposition to Islamist terrorist cells, but on a perceived self-defense against Moslem influence supposedly endangering European culture and integrity. However, if Europe fails to integrate its Moslems, it will be faced with internal upheavals that may indeed destroy European culture as we know it today. Integration cannot be based on assimilation and absorption – Moslems come with a great, deep-rooted civilization based on an equally deep -rooted religious heritage. Moslems and especially Moslem youths, must be treated not only as individuals that may look forward to equal opportunity within a free-enterprise system, but their collective right to develop their own specific culture(s) in their own way, and on an equal basis, within the host societies, must be recognized. Moslem anti-Semitism which stems, in part at least, from a lack of Moslem integration can, ultimately, only be successfully attacked by integrated, and culturally autonomous, European Moslems. It cannot be dealt with by police. We should devise educational strategies that emphasize the connection between Islamic, Christian-European and Judaic civilizations, their achievements and their problems, as a practical, rather than an abstract, way of teaching mutual understanding; not tolerance, but acceptance. The right of each civilization ethnicity, religion, nationality, nation-state, or federation, to free and unfettered development could be another major point of emphasis, again, bolstered by historical examples. By nurturing pride in a Moslem heritage, one can open young Moslem hearts to the appreciation of other cultures and civilizations. Teaching about National Socialism as the extreme, racist, opposite pole to such an approach, could introduce us into discussing Holocaust and genocide issues, without arousing immediate opposition and distrust.

Among best practices are undoubtedly efforts at peer education, in a flexible educational situation, such as the experiments now being conducted in Berlin, where teachers use students to lead discussion in peer groups centered around these themes.

There is, obviously, a common interest of Europe and the Jewish people: the common struggle against mass violence and genocidal threats. We must not separate the singular memory of the Holocaust from a topical concern about genocide generally. If we isolate the Holocaust as totally unique – and I am talking as a scholar of the Holocaust – we may make it irrelevant, because if it stands completely outside general concerns, it becomes the target of meaningless memorials and attendant clichés. But the Holocaust was a form of genocide, after all, and in order to show to students that it was the most extreme, unprecedented form of a general human disease, we must compare it to other genocides, such as in Darfur today. Contemporary anti-Semitism can easily be shown to be based on a similar, ethno-nationalistic basis. Nazi anti-Semitism produced a genocide 60 odd years ago, and it was one of the central elements in an ideology that destroyed Europe and killed some 35 million people. Isn't that enough to make all of us, Europeans or not, allies against anti-Semitism in its modern form? Teaching about the dangers of genocide generally, and contemporary examples specifically, may be the right way of teaching against anti-Semitism, about the World War, and the Holocaust. One can, I think, explain in an educational set up, the connection between these issues, and lead up to the right of peoples and nations to independence and equality, without denying the problems. In our specific context, that means not running away from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in an educational environment, but not presenting it as a black-and-white issue. Rather, as a situation demanding a compromise, emphasizing the right of both sides to self-determination. This is also an indirect way to deal, in an educational context, with chattering-class anti-Semitism. Recognizing the claim of Jews and their civilization to self-determination, together with the right to criticize anyone and everyone, then becomes a specific example of a general principle that one can show to students as an ideal. I think that more good ideas will emerge from an expert meeting on Holocaust education and best practices organized in conjunction by ODHIR and Yad Vashem for October this year. More can also be learned from the experience gathered by the Task Force for Holocaust Education, some of whose experts are here with us and can enlarge on it. The questions, then, that I suggest we pose to ourselves are these:

- Can we legitimately use history to show that anti-Semitism has led to disaster, primarily of course to Jews, but as a result of that to millions of others?

- Can we use educational strategies to help integrate deprived parts of the population into the societies in which they live?
- Can we show that anti-Semitism is morally repugnant in any society, and link it, not ignoring its exceptional specificity and historical depth, with islamophobia and other group hatreds?
- Can we show that hate propaganda against any state, nation, or group, including the Jews and their nation State, is ultimately disastrous to those who preach it, and is connected to genocidal dangers past and present?

The OSCE is a political body, and it cannot and should not itself engage in education or instruction. It has ODIHR to do that. OSCE deals with legislation and law enforcement, and that is good. We do not need more moral sermons, we do not need more speeches and clichés, we do not need long lectures such as this one. We need action.