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## **Antisemitism in Germany and its Relation to Holocaust Remembrance**

The journalist and long-time (1919-1938) publisher of the German-Jewish newspaper “Jüdische Rundschau” in the 20s and 30s, Robert Weltsch, said after a visit to Germany in 1946: “We cannot accept that there are Jews who feel drawn to Germany...But in fact there are still a few thousand living in Germany today...This remnant of a Jewish settlement should be liquidated as soon as possible... Germany is no place for Jews.” Weltsch, who in 1933 had still called for Jews to remain steadfast and stay in Germany instead of choosing emigration, has himself been forced to immigrate to Palestine in 1938.

Weltsch expressed the same feelings as did the overwhelming majority of Jews in the world, for whom the rebuilding of Jewish life in Germany after the Holocaust seemed unthinkable. The nation of murderers had to be taboo for the victims; at best, it could serve as a transit point on the way to Erez-Israel or America. For the vast majority of survivors, the stay in Germany was only an intermediate stop, required by external circumstances, on the way to Erez-Israel. Settling in Germany for a longer period did not come into question under any circumstances.

The then decision by some of the survivors to remain in or return to Germany was based on a wide variety of factors. Actual motives—personal connections to the homeland, being rooted in German culture—tend to fade in memory, and politically motivated explanations are moved to the foreground. Certainly the suitcases were always packed, but there was a willingness to take the risk of testing the durability and level of acceptance of the democracy that was just getting off the ground.

After World War II the Allies believed that they could free the Germans from “Nationalism and Militarism”— thus the phrasing of the law passed in March 1946 by the National Council in the U.S. Zone of Germany — by means of the war crimes trials and denazification. The majority of the German population considered the chapter of their joint responsibility closed after the end of these processes. Simultaneous with the trials and denazification, the phenomenon of antisemitism because of Auschwitz – currently referred on as secondary antisemitism - arose, a form of antisemitism which resulted from

the repression of the consciousness of guilt over the murder of millions of Jews, and which lost nothing in its renewed form. This secondary antisemitism no longer emerged from group conflicts over equal rights and social integration, but rather, found its justification in a supposedly discredited past, and was therefore fundamentally connected to the problem of guilt and responsibility. Here antisemitism has close ties to the reluctance of remembering the Holocaust in parts of the German society or at least feelings of shame and strategies to avoid dealing with the past. Above all this is also one of the important issues of differentiation between antisemitism and racism or xenophobia against other minorities.

Already in 1946, the American military government (OMGUS) in the U.S. Zone surveyed the public mood with respect to a variety of questions, including an assessment of the still very present antisemitic prejudices. In the first years following the end of the war, resentment against Jews was rarely expressed in public, given the presence of the occupying power. Survey results demonstrate nonetheless that antisemitism continued to thrive. Initially, antisemitic attitudes were expressed with remarkable openness; later, latent antisemitism could only be revealed through skillful questioning. In December 1946, the OMGUS survey revealed 21% of the population to be antisemites and 19% as “hardened” antisemites. Although the spread of antisemitism has slowed over subsequent generations, since the late 80s we can identify antisemitism in about 15% of the population. This antisemitism generally remains latent. But antisemitic attacks since 1945 mostly targeting Jewish memorials and symbols showed that to a certain extent this latency could also become virulent. That is, rather than targeting individuals for personal attack, the perpetrators sought to destroy Jewish life by means of removing the historical memory of Nazi persecution. Especially in Germany, but also in Austria, this was (and is) due to an extreme right-wing scene which in eliminating remembrance wanted (wants to) get rid of the past, or at least of the responsibility for the genocide. In 1959 the desecration of a synagogue in Cologne caused over 400 threats against Jewish cemeteries and institutions – limited not only to the Western part of Germany but also effected the Eastern part. In the Federal Republic this caused positive reactions on a pedagogical level. A change in education has taken place which was even more effected by the protests of the 1968 generation and their revolts against their parents and the establishment who insistently kept silent about the Third Reich. After all a fundamental rethinking in the

educational field had taken place after the American TV-movie “Holocaust” was transmitted in Germany in 1979.

Today we have to state awareness to and analysis of antisemitism within the scientific world, in the better part of the political establishment, as well as amongst public opinion leaders. In November 2008 in memory of the November pogrom 1938 the German Parliament adopted a resolution against antisemitism which focuses on a support of Jewish life in Germany and an intensive work on pedagogical measures against antisemitic tendencies. The parliamentarians agreed upon the implementation of an expert body – where I am a member of - to organize and to supervise this initiative. Based on the so called “Working definition of antisemitism” of the Human Dimension Department of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – OSCE - and the European Fundamental Rights Organisation one of the main task of this expert body on antisemitism will be to raise awareness also on subtle forms of antisemitism often not recognised as such. There it becomes obvious that for a greater part in German society the border line between legitimate Israel criticism and the use of antisemitic stereotypes is not clear enough. They are not aware that it is not any more the Jew who is targeted but the State of Israel instead by using the same old and traditional stereotypes known from the long history of antisemitism.

Since the second Intifada the tradition of demonising Jews has been transferred to the State of Israel. The French philosopher Pierre-André Taguieff calls this *nouvelle judéophobie planétaire*, “new planetary judeophobia,” the idea that all the world’s problems are due to the existence of Israel (Taguieff 2002). This new judeophobia was initiated by radical Islamic activists, by the heirs of “third-worldism,” and by far-left anti-globalization activists. Such groups accuse the Jews of being themselves racist. Thus, according to Taguieff, there seems to be an “anti-Jewish anti-racism.” In this way, traditional antisemitism has metamorphosed into a more respectable form, and is positioned to make its way into the political mainstream. Criticism of Israeli politics from this perspective invokes a double-standard in which Israel is evaluated differently to other states, false historical parallels are drawn (equating with the National Socialists), and antisemitic myths and stereotypes are used to characterize Israel or Israelis. Israeli policies toward the Palestinians for those holding such views provide reason to denounce Jews generally as perpetrators, thereby calling into question the moral status as victims that

they had assumed as a consequence of the Holocaust. The connection between antisemitism and anti-Israeli/antizionist sentiments lies in this opportunity of a revival of the perpetrator victim role and of a platform which is easy to be used to express traditional antisemitic stereotypes against Israel evading the *au goût* of being antisemite or even express prosecute relevant issues. This also influences the public discourse on the Holocaust and after all education tools in the area of Holocaust-education.

In recent years there is a boom of Holocaust and National-socialist related German documentary films, movies and douku-soaps. The attention they got and the media reaction giving the impression that these films finally explain the Holocaust and National socialism left historians a little bit perplexed. Some of the films and the following media coverage suggested that those films and documentaries showed new, never researched parts of the history or that they would transmit the historical truth - which is not the case. People were attracted by the stories and storm into the cinemas. The same occurred with some TV transmissions, which had a high percentage of viewers. Hundred of books, endless historical researches and exhibitions on the Holocaust and the National-socialist period obviously have had no greater influence – but one sided books as the one by Daniel Goldhagen or films had and still have an enormous impact in public. But all this is not only negative - such events also push debates and lead to knew perspectives the public would never gain from research books.

Nevertheless - generally spoken - it has to be clear that knowledge about the Holocaust does not prevent holding antisemitic stereotypes. Though blaming Jews for dominating public discourse with Holocaust related issues does not only serve as a tool to prevent debating German responsibility but it also serves as a platform to transport old antisemitic stereotypes. Surveys of the Anti-Defamation-League in the last years showed that 45% of the Germans believe, that “Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust.” This shows that with the media coverage of the theme there is not triggered just a feeling of satiation, but it gives also the wrong impression that Jews were constantly talking about their fate. The high level of agreement is also an expression of a defense against dealing with the past and a debt write-up to the Jews, who are declared responsible that the awaited final line -“Schlusstrich” - under the past cannot be made.

Such appreciations also play a role in current discourses about the Holocaust in Germany but also in other Eastern and Middle European countries dealing with their double historical past – the Nazi period and the Stalinist area. Historians compare these two dictatorships for evaluating equal patterns and after all specify the differences. The political scientist Claus Leggewie once formulated: "The difficulty of the European culture of memory is to point on the singularity of the breaking of civilization by the industrially and bureaucratically organized destruction of the European Jews without dogmatically avoid the historical comparison with the systematic extermination of 'class and people enemies' in the Soviet sphere."

In public debates about both dictatorships there is a tendency to leave the level of scientific approach and equate both dictatorial systems. This opens a ground for a trivialization of the Holocaust what might course also a challenge to memorial sites, which have to cover both historical periods. As trivialization is a strategy of the far right circles in Germany to evade criminal prosecution based on the law against Holocaust denial this might soften the borders between extreme positions and the mainstream.

Parallel with the beginning of the second Intifada in 2000 antisemitism in Europe reached a turning point. After 1945 the history shows that antisemitic attacks have mostly targeted Jewish memorials and symbols and the main proponents of "classical" antisemitism, which emerges basically from problems of coming to terms with the Nazi past, were found in the extreme rightwing and up to the conservative camps, the most recent antisemitism emerging from the Middle East conflict has also a leftwing provenance.

For Europe and especially for Germany, the Finnish social psychologist Karmela Liebkind summarizes this phenomenon most accurately: "Israel serves as catalyst and projecting screen for resentment which has its proper source in Europeans' feelings of guilt and in the traditional antisemitism of Western culture".<sup>1</sup> In Germany this is not a new development. Antisemitism sometimes connected to anti-American feelings is obvious since the 1970<sup>th</sup> and the Yom-Kippur-War. The Middle East conflict has reinforced the traditional link between antisemitism and anti-Americanism, a strain of hatred that

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<sup>1</sup> Karmela Liebkind, Comments prepared for the "Round Table on Manifestations of Anti-Semitism in Europe, EUMC, Vienna 2002,

became particularly virulent with the portrayal of the United States as Israel's protector and as the driving force behind the Iraq War and the 'war on terrorism.'

In some Western European countries we have to face new trends. On the one side there are perpetrators from certain anti-globalization movements and on the other side people of migrant background. This applies to people with Polish and Russian roots but particularly also to youngsters with an Arab or even Turkish background.

Profound research has been done on right-extreme but also on leftwing antisemitism. However there is still a lack of empirical data concerning antisemitism in the migrant communities in Germany. Only a few perpetrators of Muslim descent committed crimes with an antisemitic background in Germany so far – most of such crimes are still coming from the right-extreme scene. Antisemitic resentments of young people with Muslim migrant background are more a reflection of a discriminated minority, as a strong antisemitic worldview. Forms of antisemitic / anti-Zionist prejudices today are mainly to be watched in verbal derailments on schoolyards. It is not limited to students of Muslim migrant background. Swear words like "You Jew- Du Jude" are widespread - often uncritically, or expressed as a provocation. Anyway this needs to be addressed but in its context.

In recent years, the impression that antisemitic dispositions are particularly a phenomenon of young people of Arab or Turkish descent has got a wide media coverage in Germany. The realization that this population group is not free of such prejudices, has only gradually enforced, and has long been suppressed. There is, however, the question of why this late insight now got the focus of attention.

Has the focus on the "Islamised antisemitism" in Germany – as the expert on these issues calls it - not gained a substitute function, as a displacement of confrontation with antisemitic stereotypes in the majority society, and doesn't it fit too well in the repertoire of islamophobic attitudes and is welcomed as a debt write-up against the Muslims in Germany? The theme "Islamised antisemitism" must by no means be omitted, but must be set in the right relative to other carrier layers of antisemitism in German society. Extremist right-wing anti-Semitic crimes are still a bigger threat to Jews in Germany.

Nevertheless, it has to be stated that we are not dealing with state-initiated or supported insults by any of the European countries as in the 1930s. Comparisons to the

1930s, drawn by some Israeli politicians and Jewish representatives miss the mark. Today, unlike the 1930s, we have to state awareness to and analysis of antisemitism within the scientific world, in the better part of the political establishment, as well as amongst public opinion leaders. Investigation of anti-Semitic threats by state authorities and court procedures against perpetrators are basic principles not to be compared with the Nazi persecution of the Jews.

In Germany antisemitic expressions by politicians or political leaders within the democratic spectrum are not tolerated – if this has occurred in the last years they have been expelled from their political parties. Antisemitic violent acts are openly bashed by political leaders. But we have to admit that the sensibility for the borderlines between legitimate criticism of Israel or Israeli politics and statements with antisemitic connotations is not any more the same as it was 20 years ago. This does not mean that there is a rise in antisemitism but the taboo to express antisemitic feelings seems to soften. This is especially evident looking on letters and emails the Central Council of Jews in Germany or even the Israeli Embassy in Berlin receives.

Opinion polls on mainstream attitudes vis-à-vis Jews in Germany have not shown any substantial change in the last years – the results are between 15 and 20%. Numbers of threats and abuses against Jewish institutions, synagogues and cemeteries for the years 2001 to 2008, registered by the Office of the Protection of the Constitution, show around 1500 to 1600 antisemitic criminal acts (whereas in 2003 and 2004 the numbers were lower - 1300/1400) - the overwhelming majority of them antisemitic and neo-Nazi hate speech of right-extreme provenance. Of the total there were between 30 and 60 violent acts. In 2008 from the total of 47 violent acts, 44 were committed by right-extreme perpetrators, 2 by perpetrators of the extreme left and one by – as they call it - “foreigners”. The numbers of 2009 – not already officially public - show that in January 2009 around the Gaza war the number of criminal acts arose considerable to 315 whereas since 2007 the monthly data lay around 230 to 270. The impact of the Gaza war was obvious already in December 2008 where 292 criminal acts and 11 violent acts have been registered. Generally the numbers for 2009 decreased slightly compared to 2008. For the first quarter of 2010 the registered 183 criminal acts show a considerable decrease.

The number of teachers seeking help and advice at our Center for Research on Antisemitism, the keen demand for teacher further education, a surprisingly strong participation at the annual summer universities against antisemitism staged by our Centre – all this indicates the strain and the challenges faced by teachers today and, moreover, highlights that only long-term projects against antisemitism can lastingly offset the deficiencies in education.

At the same time however, the topic of antisemitism must be brought to the attention of state and municipal education authorities. Increasing their sensibility is crucial, for without recommendations from politicians and school authorities, the large majority of teachers and educationalists who do not appreciate the necessity of addressing current forms of antisemitism over and above the well-rehearsed routine of excursions to memorial sites and “Holocaust Education”, will not be open to new educational approaches in this thematic complex.

After all we have to sensitise the public that antisemitism is not a problem Jews have to solve but the major society has to become aware that antisemitism is still a problem today and will not be solved if the Middle East conflict will once end – because either Israel nor “the Jews” are guilty for antisemitic stereotypes.