

# France: A Pioneer of New Antisemitism in Europe

by **Manfred Gerstenfeld** (July 2015)

Anti-Semitism is not only part of European history but also an ingredient of its culture. The lengthy anti-Semitic history of Europe is rife with defamation, discrimination, double standards, pogroms, expulsions and other persecutions. It reached its profoundly low point with the Holocaust. The genocide was implemented not only by Germans and Austrians, but also by many of their collaborators, not necessarily all pro-Nazi, in the occupied countries.

As far as Holocaust history is concerned, almost all occupied countries eventually admitted the truth of their failure and of their varying degrees of collaboration with the Nazis. Most of them apologized.[\[1\]](#) A few weeks ago, Luxemburg became the most recent country to do so.[\[2\]](#) The one major exception is the Netherlands. The current Prime Minister, Mark Rutte (Liberal Party), recently gave, for the second time, a non-relevant answer to parliamentary questions in order to avoid admitting the scandalous failure of the wartime Dutch government. While in exile in London, it showed no interest in the mass murder taking place – the annihilation of three-quarters of the Netherlands' 140,000 Jews by the German occupiers. The Jewish community had been present in the Netherlands for centuries.[\[3\]](#)

While there is little debate about the anti-Semitic history of Europe, a more detailed explanation is required regarding anti-Semitism being an ingredient of European culture, and arguably a dominant part in regard to its Jews. To avoid any misunderstanding, this does not mean that nowadays most Europeans are anti-Semites.

The Post-Holocaust emergence of anti-Israelism which is also frequently called the New Antisemitism bears special examination. This is in particular the case in France, where

it exploded most forcefully at the beginning of this century.

The late leading academic scholar of anti-Semitism, Robert Wistrich, has provided much of the historical background for understanding and proving that anti-Semitism is an integral part of European culture. Wistrich detailed how intellectual trends in Europe influenced the mutation of anti-Semitism accordingly. That is true for France, but also for many other European countries. He explained how the ancient Christian anti-Semitic tradition continued during the Enlightenment, illustrating it with the hatred Voltaire felt for the Jewish people. Wistrich also mentioned the subsequent generations of anti-Semites, such as the German idealist philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries, including Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and later on, Karl Marx.

Wistrich claimed that with rare exceptions, the French socialists of the early 19th century laid the groundwork for late 19th century anti-Semitism. He remarked that Edouard Drumont's anti-Semitic work, *La France Juive* ("Jewish France") was the bestseller of its time. It had about a hundred editions.[\[4\]](#)

To that one can add that a variety of leading European novelists were extreme anti-Semites. One of the more famous ones was the Frenchman Louis-Ferdinand Céline, who was convicted after the Second World War for collaborating with the occupiers.[\[5\]](#) There are also ancient anti-Semitic sculptures on buildings, for instance on the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris.[\[6\]](#)

#### **France and the rise of the New Antisemitism**

Anti-Semitism in Europe has increased to a level where many committed Jews ask themselves if they should emigrate. The same is true for a significant number of more assimilated Jews as well. Even more widespread across the Jewish community is the question whether their children should remain in their native country.

In an environment where the Jewish community has great doubts regarding its future, it helps to get a better perspective by looking back to the European anti-Semitism that reached unprecedented post-war levels after the Second Intifada in 2000.

Of all the European countries, France is a good one to use as an example, for a number of

reasons. Since 2000, the level and nature of anti-Semitic incidents occurring in France – which included several murders of Jews by Muslims – have been more severe than in other European countries. France not only has the largest Jewish community in Europe, with half a million Jews, but also has the largest Muslim community, with an estimated five million. In addition, the first high-level analysts who came forward to assess the new anti-Semitism which differs, to a large extent, from the classic religious and ethnic anti-Semitism, did so in France.

The work of these analysts is not well-known internationally because most of it was published in French. It remains of great importance, however, because so much of what they originally observed has expanded to even greater proportions. This is due, to a large extent, to the failure of governmental authorities. The sociologist Shmuel Trigano, one of Europe's leading Jewish thinkers, was one of the first to make a substantial contribution in exposing and assessing the situation. At the end of 2001, Trigano began publishing a series of articles titled, "Observatoire du monde juif."[\[7\]](#) (*Observatory of the Jewish world*), a series which lasted more than two and a half years.

Trigano succeeded in organizing the collaboration of a substantial number of authors who analyzed many aspects of the hate-fueled outbursts. The first issue, dated November 2001, contained titles indicative of the climate for the French Jewish community: "The Jews of France Targeted by the Intifada?", "An Atmosphere of Insecurity," "The Middle East Conflict is Exported to Western Democracies," "The Anti-Jewish Aggressions," "The Perverse Logic of French Politics," "Religious Anti-Semitism," "Political Anti-Semitism," and "The Extreme Left and its Ideological Manipulations."[\[8\]](#) These could very well be titles of current essays since the situation has only worsened.

In another issue published in 2002, Alexandre del Valle explained the convergence of various totalitarianisms in an article titled, "The New Red, Brown, and Green Faces of Anti-Semitism," referring to the coming together of communism, fascism and Islamism in regard to anti-Semitism.[\[9\]](#) In the next issue, Michèle Tribalat described how the Islamist social network was full of messages comparing Israel with Nazis.[\[10\]](#)

Another important scholar who greatly contributed to diagnosing the anti-Semitic reality in France is Pierre-André Taguieff. This non-Jewish philosopher published his book, "The New Judeophobia" in 2002, which made a major contribution to the understanding of anti-Israelism. Taguieff discussed this latest mutation of anti-Semitism and how it hit French Jewry. He noted that although classic anti-Semitism is considered to be politically incorrect, anti-Israelism did not encounter such resistance and was thus able to expand rapidly.

Taguieff exposed the process by which the crimes of the allegedly deprived, a group to whom the Palestinians claim to belong, are condoned. He described the role of the media in justifying violence and portraying criminals as victims. He pointed out that the next step in the distortion process was to declare that the criminals, now disguised as victims, were not to be held responsible for their acts because they are molded by their socio-economic conditions.

Taguieff also exposed other key issues such as the belief that Muslims and Arabs behave as they do because they are supposedly humiliated or persecuted. He identified the new myth of the "intrinsically good Palestinian," or, in other words, that the Palestinians can do no wrong. Taguieff stated that blind pacifism places both the aggressor and his victim at the same level of morality and turns legitimate self-defense into a criminal transgression.[\[11\]](#) These days we can see many examples of this phenomena, including the newly published report of the United Nations Human Rights Commission report on the 2014 Gaza war.[\[12\]](#)

Taguieff also exposed the widespread fallacy that Islamophobia was a larger problem than anti-Semitism. The risk for Jews of being attacked in France was and remains many times greater than the risk of Muslims being attacked.

Another major contributor in understanding France's ongoing decay was Emmanuel Brenner, a pseudonym for the historian Georges Bensoussan. Together with a number of contributors he published a book in 2002 whose title translates as "The Lost Territories of the French Republic." The authors analyzed the breakdown of law and order in various areas of French society, pointing out the fear police officers have of entering certain urban areas which are mainly populated by North African immigrants and their descendants. They also analyzed the breakdown of society in parts of the school system where anti-Semitism, racism, and sexual discrimination have become rampant. They reported that in schools with large Muslim majorities, children of other backgrounds often find themselves so intimidated that they attempt to hide their identity.[\[13\]](#)

It was also in France that the first government study of the massive outbreak of anti-Semitism in Europe was conducted. It was ordered in 2003 by Nicolas Sarkozy, who was the Minister of the Interior at the time. The study's author was doctor, diplomat, and humanitarian activist Jean-Christophe Rufin, who identified the core of many of France's anti-Semitic and race-related problems, which have not only persisted but expanded exponentially. This document merits a separate analysis.[\[14\]](#)

## **Conclusion**

The fact that a substantial number of Europeans today agree with the statement that “Israel conducts a war of extermination against the Palestinians” is a major example of contemporary European anti-Semitism. This statement was deemed accurate by more than 40 percent of EU citizens aged 16 or older. It fits the anti-Semitic culture of Europe perfectly.[\[15\]](#)

The American political scientist Andrei Markovits summarized a key element of Europe’s current reality: “Europe has a major unresolved relationship with its past. The constant analogizing of Israelis with Nazis comes from the European gut. This, of course, is a double effrontery. By doing this, Europeans absolve themselves of their own history. At the same time they succeed in accusing their former victims of behaving like their worst perpetrators.”[\[16\]](#)

The leaders of the continent where Nazism was born and allowed to flourish nowadays devote relatively little of their admonitions to the Nazi-like policies and statements emerging from various terrorist organizations in the Middle East. These include Hamas, the largest Palestinian party. The genocide promotion of the latter is not Hitler’s Nazism, but a Nazism originating from parts of Islam.

The next time European representatives criticize Israel regarding its policies, the Israeli answer should be that in view of Europe’s past, they would do best to focus on Islamo-Nazism.

Those officials of the EU and of its member countries who constantly and disproportionately admonish Israel have but immoral legs to stand on.

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[\[1\]](#) Manfred Gerstenfeld, *The Abuse of Holocaust Memory: Distortions and Responses*, (Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2009), 136-150.

[\[2\]](#) “EJC welcomes Luxembourg apology for role in Holocaust”, *European Jewish Congress*, 11 June 2015.

.<sup>[3]</sup> Gerstenfeld, *The Abuse of Holocaust Memory: Distortions and Responses*, 141

<sup>[4]</sup> Manfred Gerstenfeld interviews Robert Wistrich, "Intellectuals and anti-Semitism: a millennial tradition", *Jewish Tribune*, 13 August 2013.

<sup>[5]</sup> [Antoine Peillon](#), *Céline, un antisémite exceptionnel*, Une Histoire française, Lormont: Le Bord de l'eau, 2011.[French]

<sup>[6]</sup> Toni L. Kamins, "From Notre-Dame de Paris to Prague, Europe's anti-Semitism is literally carved in stone, JTA 20 March 2015.

<sup>[7]</sup> <http://obs.monde.juif.free.fr/>

<sup>[8]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[9]</sup> Alexandre del Valle "Les nouveaux visages rouge-bruns-verts de l'antisémitisme", *Observatoire du monde juif*, bulletin no. 3, June 2002.

<sup>[10]</sup> Michèle Tribalat, "L'obsession anti-israélienne sur le net islamique", *Observatoire du monde juif*, bulletin no. 4/5, December 2002.

<sup>[11]</sup> Pierre-André Taguieff, *Rising from the Muck: The New Anti-Semitism in Europe* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004). The original French version was published under the title *La Nouvelle judéophobie* (Paris: Fayard/Mille et Une Nuits, 2002).

<sup>[12]</sup> Report of the detailed findings of the Commission of Inquiry of the United Nations Human Rights Council on the 2014 Gaza conflict (A/HRC/29/CRP.4). Released on 22 June 2015.

<sup>[13]</sup> Emmanuel Brenner, *Les territoires perdus de la République: Antisémitisme, racisme et sexisme en milieu scolaire* (Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 2004). (French)

<sup>[14]</sup>

[www.interieur.gouv.fr/rubriques/c/c2\\_le\\_ministere/c21\\_actualite/2004\\_10\\_19\\_rufin/rapport\\_Rufi](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/rubriques/c/c2_le_ministere/c21_actualite/2004_10_19_rufin/rapport_Rufi)

[\[15\]](#) Toni L. Kamins, "From Notre-Dame de Paris to Prague, Europe's anti-Semitism is literally carved in stone, JTA 20 March 2015.

[\[16\]](#) Manfred Gerstenfeld, Interview with Andrei S. Markovits, "European Anti-Americanism and Anti-Semitism: Similarities and Differences," *Post-Holocaust and Anti-Semitism* No. 16, January 2004.

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