

In Norway, Signs of Intelligent Life

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Hanne Nabintu Herland

Norway has for a long time been one of the most pro-Palestinian of European countries. Its anti-Israel votes in the U.N., its media's coverage of Israel's supposed misdeeds, the public opinion polls that reveal high levels of antisemitism in the Norwegian public, all support [the charge](#) made by Hanne Nabintu Herland, a Norwegian historian of religion, bestselling author, and social commentator who, at a conference in Jerusalem in 2012, accused Norway of being "the most anti-Semitic country in the West" and attacked the government in Oslo for "biased support for only the Palestinian views."

Herland noted that "the degree of anti-Israelism in Norway today on the state level, in the media, in the trade unions and at the universities, colleges and schools is unprecedented

in modern Norwegian history. The powerful individuals that have pushed for these negative and biased attitudes in Norway are today responsible for creating a politically-correct hatred towards Israel that today portrays my country internationally as the most anti-Semitic country in the West." She quoted several surveys and reports that showed that "Jew" is the most often used curse word in Oslo schools and that a third of Jewish children feel continuously bullied. She also mentioned a widely-quoted survey that showed that 12 percent of Norwegians harbored "strong anti-Jewish prejudices" and that more than a third of the population believes Israel's treatment of Palestinians "was analogous to Nazi actions against Jews."

Since Herland's remarks in 2012, nothing appeared to have improved: Norway continued to vote against Israel at the U.N., its politicians and the Norwegian media continued to portray Israel as the oppressor of the "poor Palestinians," continued to describe the West Bank as "occupied territories," continued to ignore the terror attacks on Israelis supported by both the PA and Hamas. That is, nothing improved until this December, when the Norwegian parliament called on the Palestinian Authority to remove violent, racist and antisemitic materials from its school curriculum, or else face a drop or even a total cessation in funding.

[Here](#) is the sign of intelligent life in Norway.

A majority in the Storting's 16-member Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense agreed that financial support to the Palestinian Authority should be cut or reduced "if they do not provide satisfactory improvements to the school materials," the Aftenposten, Norway's largest circulation newspaper, reported.

"We can no longer sit still and watch Norwegian money contribute to a teaching system that encourages children to violence and promotes racism and antisemitism," Hans Andreas

Limi, parliamentary leader of the libertarian Progress Party, was quoted as saying.

The move follows a November report in Aftenposten that featured examples of incitement to violence and racial hate in Palestinian school materials, based on findings by the Jerusalem-based Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se).

The article, as well as IMPACT-se briefings to legislators and other officials, “unleashed a major public debate in Norway about the country’s funding of the extremist Palestinian Ministry of Education textbooks,” the research group said on Thursday.

There have been complaints made about antisemitism in Palestinian textbooks for years. And for years the Norwegian government has gullibly accepted the PA’s reassurances that the matter would be dealt with. It never was. But now, some kind of mental dam appears to have burst in the Norwegian government. The report prepared by IMPACT about the PA’s antisemitic and racist textbooks was so thorough and devastating that it could not be ignored. The report also reminded Norwegians that for years there had been demands made by the Norwegian government that changes be made in the textbooks used in PA schools, followed by promises solemnly given by the PA that it would do so, but nothing ever happened. That IMPACT report, and the noisy discussion it has prompted in both Parliament and the media, suggest that Norwegians have had quite enough of those promises, and will now be cutting funds to the PA schools unless those changes are at long last realized.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Ine Eriksen Søreide weighed in, indicating that successive Norwegian governments broached the topic of the school curriculum with the Palestinian Authority, and that some changes to the syllabus have taken

place – a claim contested by IMPACT-se.

“On one hand, they tell foreign governments that are horrified by what they have seen that changes are possible,” IMPACT-se CEO Marcus Sheff told The Algemeiner on Thursday. “On the other hand, in Arabic, they tell their own people, ‘Over our dead bodies. It’s not going to happen.’ The question is which narrative is going to emerge victorious.”

For years, the PA has been pretending to be shocked, shocked! about the antisemitism in own textbooks and continually promises to do something about it. Meanwhile, years have gone by. Many Western countries continue to object, but none have taken practical measures to force change. Now Norway, of all countries, has done so. Appeals to morality and decency have had no effect on the PA; a cut in aid, or even a total cessation, of aid to PA schools, is the only thing that might cause the Palestinians to change those texts.

“Nobody wants to be taken for a chump,” added Sheff. “Nobody wants their hard-earned tax money – which is supposed to be used for development and helping children – to instead radicalize children to commit violence and sacrifice themselves.”

The Palestinian Authority has faced continued criticism over its educational curriculum, with a 2018 report by IMPACT-se noting that grade 1-12 textbooks routinely describe Israel as the “Zionist Occupation,” refer to United Nations-recognized Israeli territory as Palestinian, and in some cases praise acts of Palestinian violence against civilians. A September review by the watchdog group of new educational materials used in the 2019–20 academic year found “a systematic insertion of violence, martyrdom and jihad across all grades and subjects.”

In an unprecedented move in August, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination criticized the

Palestinian Authority over "the existence of hate speech in ... school curricula and textbooks, which fuels hatred and may incite violence, particularly hate speech against Israelis, which at times also fuels antisemitism."

This criticism of the PA by a Committee at the UN, which spends so much of its time denouncing Israel, comes very late in the day, but is most welcome. Could it be that at the U.N. itself, that has for so long served as a kangaroo court, with Israel the perennial defendant in the dock, more of its members are willing to declare themselves outraged by the antisemitism taught in the PA's schools? Votes in the General Assembly are also changing. Anti-Israel resolutions still pass, but with ever diminishing majorities; this year, 13 countries that last year had either abstained or voted "yes" on an annual resolution that supports a pro-Palestinian UN agency changed their vote to no; these included Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Lithuania, Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Brazil and Colombia, which usually abstain, voted against the resolution regarding the Division of Palestinian Rights at the UN Secretariat, the Times of Israel reported. This caught the Arab delegates by surprise; is it a one-off or is it, rather, a sign of moral progress and political realism? About half of the countries that changed their vote to "no" this year have been suffering from the large-scale presence of Muslim migrants; perhaps they are beginning to link the Muslim war on Israel to the Jihad from which they too are suffering?

Norway committed this year to granting the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education 220 million krone (some \$24 million) by 2022, with annual installments of 55 million krone (\$6 million).

IMPACT-se indicated that Thursday's announcement may affect future disbursement of funds.

In her comments last month, Søreide said Norwegian support did not go to the development of school curriculum or textbook printing, but rather school construction and furnishing, student transportation and teacher training.

It's unclear whether Søreide's previous remarks, that Norwegian support was not given for the development of the PA's school curriculum or textbook printing, was meant to suggest there was no reason to cut funds intended for other purposes – school construction, transportation, and teacher training. But funds are fungible. Of course Norway can cut its aid to PA schools, of whatever kind,, even if earmarked for school construction, in order to obtain the desired result from the refractory Palestinians – which is the removal of antisemitic and racist textbooks.

She pointed to the ongoing review of Palestinian textbooks being carried out by the Germany-based Georg Eckert Institute, with support from the European Union. "Norway has been actively involved in the preparation of the study and is participating in further follow-up," she said.

If even Norway, for so long considered the most anti-Israel of European countries, is now making clear it is fed up with the PA's continued refusal to deal with its blatantly antisemitic textbooks, and is willing to do the only thing that gets the PA's attention – that is, cut aid – perhaps there is hope yet.

Let's see how Mahmoud Abbas handles this. It doesn't appear that the usual playbook, where the PA promises to clean up those textbooks and then does nothing, can be followed this time. There's been too much of a public uproar, following the release of the irrefutable IMPACT report. Perhaps Norway will make up for its previous indifference, or rather hostility, to the besieged Jewish state, in dealing with this textbook case of antisemitism. If this is not to be just an isolated example

of sanity in Norwegian foreign policy, but to signal a permanent turn in that policy, the Norwegians need to be persuaded – this calls for all islamocritical hands on deck – that the Jihad against Israel is the same Jihad, based on the same Qur’anic texts, that is being pursued against them and other Europeans, albeit with different instruments, by the tens of millions of Muslims who have been allowed so foolishly to settle in their midst. Once that understanding has been reached, Norwegians, sufficiently alarmed, will comprehend that in standing with Israel against the “Palestinian” Jihadis, they are helping to defend themselves.

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