

Some Jewish issues in Denmark, France, Germany, Belgium, Hungary

HRWF (02.06.2018) – Various issues concerning Jews in Europe have recently gained momentum in the media: the debate on the ban of circumcision in Iceland and other Scandinavian countries, acts of violence targeting Jews in other countries. See hereafter a short overview concerning their situation in several EU countries.

Danish parliament set to debate proposal to ban circumcision

By Cnaan Liphshiz

JTA (01.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2sq3WPI> – Denmark's parliament is set to debate and possibly vote on whether nonmedical circumcision of boys should be banned after more than 50,000 people signed a petition requesting its criminalization.

The petition by the group Denmark Intact crossed the 50,000 mark Friday, four months after its launch. According to regulations passed in January, petitions approved for posting on the Danish parliament's website are brought to a vote as nonbinding motions if they receive that level of support within six months.

The petition describes circumcision as a form of abuse and corporal punishment, equating it with female genital mutilation. The petition states that parents who have their children circumcised outside Denmark should be exposed to legal action in Denmark, which has 8,000 Jews and tens of thousands of Muslims.

But last week, spokespeople for all the parties in the Danish parliament stated their faction's positions on the issue. The tally showed that a majority of lawmakers would vote against

supporting a ban if the issue is brought to a vote, the Kristeligt Dagblad daily newspaper reported. Nonetheless, a vote on the petition is likely to take place in the fall unless its language is deemed unconstitutional.

Some parties, including large coalition partners, are split on the issue. But Finn Rudaizky, a former leader of the Jewish community of Denmark, said "parliament will not change the law" that currently allows circumcision. Still, he said, the petition "does mean a great deal because it shows just how many have involved themselves with this issue."

Whereas some of those who oppose nonmedical circumcision do so because of their understanding of children's rights, "many others use the situation to show that they are against Jews, Muslims and they can express anti-Semitism and xenophobia without admitting to it," Rudaizky said. "I am not proud of this situation."

No country in Europe has banned circumcision since the defeat of fascism in World War II.

In 2014, Denmark joined a handful of European Union countries that forbid the slaughter of animals for meat without stunning, as required by Jewish and Muslim religious laws. Earlier this week, Denmark joined several EU countries banning the wearing in public of face-covering garments, such as the burka and nikab veils favored by some Muslim women.

Iceland's parliament earlier this year briefly processed a bill to ban circumcision. It was put on ice following a parliamentary committee's recommendation to nix it amid international pressure.

Opposition to circumcision and the ritual slaughter of animals in Europe features liberal activists who cite humanist motivations and anti-immigration individuals who view the customs as undesirable foreign imports.

French public schools told to enforce 2004 ban on kippah, Muslim head cover

JTA (01.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2J334L7> – The French Education Ministry sent out a circular reminding teachers that wearing religious symbols in public schools is illegal and urging them to punish noncompliant students.

The reminder appeared in an 83-page document sent Wednesday to thousands of public schools throughout France titled “handbook on laïcité,” a French-language word describing the principal of ensuring both religious freedom and the separation of religion from the state.

Like a document distributed in 2016 on the same subject, the handbook lists both the Jewish kippah, or yarmulke, as forbidden to be worn in public schools, along with head covers favored by Muslim females and large cross pendants. But it goes further than the earlier document in that it instructs teachers to pursue disciplinary measures against those who “test the application” of these rules, as per a law from 2004, the Marianne magazine reported Friday.

The handbook states it seeks primarily to “check the spread of extremist viewpoints,” a statement many take to mean radical Islam. It also calls for disciplinary action against students who refuse for religious reasons to partake in activities that some devout individuals consider improper, such as swimming lessons with members of both genders or sexual education classes.

Long skirts that appear to comply with religious requirements also are not allowed.

However, the handbook also says that the application of the ban on religious symbols should be “on a per-case basis,” according to La Depeche daily.

Whereas in the 1990s the majority of Jewish children attended public schools in France, only a third of them do so today,

according to Francis Kalifat, the head of the CRIF umbrella group of French Jewish communities. Thousands have left the public education system due to anti-Semitism, he said, including virtually all of the children from observant families where males wear a kippah and girls wear long skirts.

Still, in some places, including the affluent Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine, Jewish parents enroll their children in public schools that are considered safer than others because Jews comprise more than half of the student body. But even there, more observant parents tend to enroll their children in Jewish private schools.

Meyer Habib, a lawmaker in the lower house of the French parliament and a former vice president of the CRIF, said he supported the regulations, which he said would have little to no effect on the daily lives of French Jews.

Still, he urged selective enforcement of the regulations.

“Jewish symbols must not be treated the same as characteristics of radical Islam,” he told Ynet. “We’ve never killed innocents in Europe generally and in France specifically in the names of Jewish values,” he said of Jews.

Germany’s Jews urged not to wear kippahs after attacks

BBC (24.04.2018) – <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43884075> – The leader of Germany’s Jewish community has advised Jews to avoid wearing traditional skullcaps (kippahs) following anti-Semitic attacks.

Josef Schuster, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, told Berlin public radio that Jews should exercise caution in big cities. His comments come ahead of a “Berlin Wears Kippah” solidarity march in the German capital on Wednesday.

Last week, two young men wearing kippahs were assaulted in the city. The attacker was filmed shouting anti-Semitic abuse.

Jewish organisations in Germany have expressed alarm over a number of recent anti-Semitic insults and threats in schools.

At the weekend, Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned what she described as “another form of anti-Semitism”.

She told Israel’s Channel 10 TV network that aside from anti-Semitism by right-wing groups, similar threats were coming from some Muslim refugees in the country.

What did Josef Schuster say?

“Defiantly showing your colours would in principle be the right way to go [to tackle anti-Semitism],” he said.

“Nevertheless, I would advise individual people against openly wearing a kippah in big German cities,” Mr Schuster added.

But he also stressed that if Germans refused to stand up to anti-Semitism “our democracy would be at risk”.

“This is not only about anti-Semitism – it goes along with racism, it goes along with xenophobia. You need a clear stop sign here.”

What about reaction from other groups?

Mr Schuster’s comments apparently contradict the position taken on the kippah issue by the Berlin-based Jewish Forum for Democracy and Against Anti-Semitism – the organisation which shared video of last week’s attack on Facebook (<https://jfda.de/blog/2018/04/17/antisemitischer-angriff-in-berlin-prenzlauer-berg/>)

“I used to always advise my Jewish friends and acquaintances not to wear a kippah so as not to show their Jewish identity. I changed my opinion,” a spokesman said last week.

“We must take up this fight and be visible again in public.”

Separately, the head of Germany’s Central Council of Muslims condemned recent anti-Semitic attacks.

“Anti-Semitism, racism and hatred are great sins in Islam, therefore we will also never tolerate that,” Aiman Mazyek told Germany’s Rheinische Post newspaper.

Germany’s Jewish population has grown rapidly since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Before 1989, the population was below 30,000 but an influx of Jews, mainly from the former Soviet Union, has raised the number to more than 200,000.

Belgian TV cannot find a single Jew to agree to wear a yarmulke in public

Elder of Ziyon (28.05.2018) – <http://elderofziyon.blogspot.com/2018/05/belgian-tv-cannot-find-single-jew-to.html> – Natasha Mann, a reporter for Belgian broadcaster RTBF, was preparing a report on antisemitism in Belgium and wanted to have a visual of a Jew being seen in Brussels in a Jewish skullcap.

So she asked around the Jewish community to find someone who would be willing to be part of the story, just to walk around the capital for the cameras.

For ten years, most observant Jews in Brussels have been wearing caps or hats to avoid being seen publicly as Jews and to avoid being attacked.

After three weeks of looking for a single Jew to be part of the story, she had to give up. The Jewish community is so frightened of Jew-haters that literally none of them would agree to publicly wear the most basic and unobtrusive of Jewish symbols.

First, Mann contacted a couple of rabbis. After finding out which neighborhood Mann wanted them to appear in, they declined. The Chief Rabbi, who was attacked a number of years ago, originally accepted the idea but the community leaders convinced him it was not a good idea.

Mann went to other Jewish community leaders. She thought she hit paydirt when one man said he wanted to do the story, saying that he is sick of being harassed for being a Jew. Mann asked him, "Do you complain to police when you hear antisemitic insults?" He answered back, "Do you complain to police when men whistle at you in the street?" Ultimately, he declined to do the story as well.

Joel Rubinfeld, the president of the Belgian league against anti-Semitism, who normally does not wear a yarmulke, agreed to do the story – but only if he is escorted by a security officer who is in contact with the police. It is too complicated.

The story ran without the visual Mann wanted, which says a lot about how fearful the Jewish community in Belgium is, today.

Here is the story that was broadcast, without a single Jew willing to wear a yarmulke – and with a teen victim of antisemitism and his mother too afraid to show their faces (<http://elderofziyon.blogspot.com/2018/05/belgian-tv-cannot-find-single-jew-to.html>)

The safest country for European Jews? Try Hungary

By David P. Goldman

PJ Media (28.05.2018) –
<https://pjmedia.com/spengler/the-safest-country-for-european-jews-try-hungary/> – Last Friday evening I put on a kippah and walked half an hour across Budapest to the Keren Or synagogue maintained by the Budapest Chabad.

After violent attacks on Jews in German streets, the leaders of Germany's Jewish community warned Jews last month not to wear a kippah or any other visible sign of Jewish identification in public.

The French community issued such warnings years ago.

Belgian TV could not find a single Jew in Brussels willing to wear a kippah in public. I walked across Budapest four times (for Friday evening and Saturday daytime services), and no-one looked at my kippah twice. At services I met Hasidim who had walked to synagogue with kaftan and shtreimel, the traditional round fur hat. Whatever residual anti-Semitism remains among Hungarians, it doesn't interfere with the open embrace of Jewish life. There are no risks to Jews because there are very few Muslim migrants.

On any given Friday evening, the Keren Or synagogue—one of several Chabad houses in Budapest—hosts two hundred people for dinner. Jewish life isn't just flourishing in Budapest. It's roaring with ruach, and livened by a growing Israeli presence. About 100,000 Israelis have dual Hungarian citizenship; many own property in the country and vote in Hungarian elections.