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EU: New survey sheds light on deep-rooted antisemitic attitudes across EU nations

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By Ben Cohen

The Algemeiner (12.10.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3By01BQ> – Antisemitic prejudice towards Jews persists among more than 30

percent of the population in countries across Eastern Europe, while in Western Europe, hostile views of the State of Israel command similar levels of agreement despite a sharp decline in traditional antisemitic attitudes, a new survey disclosed on Tuesday.

The survey was released by the Brussels-based European Jewish Association (EJA) at a conference on Tuesday addressed by senior Jewish and Israeli leaders. Based on polling among 1,000 respondents in each of sixteen EU member states, the survey demonstrated that antisemitism was still “deeply ingrained in Europe and hard to treat,” the EJA’s president, Rabbi Menachem Margolin, said.

The polling was conducted in Dec. 2019 and Jan. 2020 – three months before European countries went into lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which itself gave rise to a new wave of antisemitic conspiracy theories.

When asked questions related to what the survey described as “primary antisemitism” – that Jewish communities are an undesirable presence, that Jews engage in shady financial practices, that a “secret Jewish network influences political and economic affairs in the world” along with similar tropes – more than a third of survey respondents in some nations of Eastern Europe manifested these attitudes.

In both Poland and Hungary, 42 percent of respondents agreed with statements based on classic antisemitic canards, with just under half agreeing “strongly.” Asked whether Jews should leave the country, 24 percent of Polish respondents agreed, while 31 percent confessed that they would be unhappy if one of the neighbors was Jewish. In Hungary, 30 percent of respondents disagreed that Europe should make all efforts to “preserve Jewish religion and culture,” 33 percent agreed that the interests of Jews differ from the general population, and

20 percent believed “it would be best if the Jews left this country.”

About 10,000 Jews currently live in Poland, a country which had a pre-World War II Jewish population of 3 million. The size of the community in Hungary is estimated at between 75,000 and 100,000. Prior to the war, more than 800,000 Jews lived in Hungary.

In Romania, the proportion of respondents agreeing with statements of “primary antisemitism” in the survey was 38 percent and in the Czech Republic 36 percent.

Levels of “primary antisemitism” were significantly lower in most of the countries that remained outside the Soviet bloc after 1945, with the exceptions of Austria, where 31 per cent of respondents were in agreement, and Greece, where an astonishing 48 percent of respondents agreed with classic antisemitic tropes.

When asked whether a secret Jewish network ran the world, 58 percent of Greek respondents answered in the affirmative. Around 6,000 Jews remain in Greece today, from a community that numbered almost 80,000 before World War II.

In those countries where antisemitic incidents remain at worryingly high levels, “primary antisemitism” nonetheless remains a relatively marginal phenomenon. In France, where nearly 700 antisemitic incidents were reported in 2020, 15 percent of respondents agreed with expressions of classical antisemitism, in Germany, where there were more than 2,000 antisemitic incidents recorded 17 percent, and in the UK, with nearly 2,000 incidents last year, just six percent. The number was even lower in the Netherlands, where only three percent of respondents exhibited hardline antisemitic attitudes.

When asked about the minimization, relativization and abuse of the Nazi Holocaust – defined by the survey as “secondary antisemitism” – antisemitic attitudes increased, according to

the survey. In Poland, where government legislation recently closed off the possibility of restitution for Holocaust survivors, a full 71 percent of respondents demonstrated antisemitic understandings of the Holocaust. Asked whether Jews were historically responsible for bringing about their persecution, 31 percent of Poles agreed, while 67 percent agreed with the statement that during World War II, "people from our nation suffered as much as Jews."

Similar attitudes towards the Holocaust were prevalent in Greece (67 percent), Hungary (80 percent), Romania (82 percent) and Austria (77 percent).

The polling also showed that hostility to Israel rooted in antisemitism remained a widespread phenomenon across Europe, with 81 percent of Spanish respondents, 75 percent of Italian respondents, 78 percent of Czech respondents and 86 percent of Polish respondents demonstrating what the survey called "antisemitic hostility against Israel." This included widespread agreement with such statements as "Israelis behave like Nazis towards the Palestinians" and "When I think of Israel's politics, I understand why some people hate the Jews."

Jewish and Israeli leaders who attended the EJA's launch of the survey sounded a pessimistic note on the implications of the data.

"One thing is certain: While the European institutions and politicians devote significant resources and spare no effort in the fight against antisemitism, the situation in Europe is not improving," commented Joel Mergui, president of the European Center for Judaism in Paris.

Margaritis Schinas – the vice-president of the European Commission, the EU's executive body – reminded those at the launch that last week, the Commission published a nine-year strategy to combat antisemitism.

“We will prevent all types of antisemitism including Israel related antisemitism which is the most common form, using all the tools at our disposal,” Schinas said. “We know that Europe can only prosper when its Jewish communities can prosper too.”

The meeting also heard from the President of Israel, Isaac Herzog, who noted the continued “threats to Jewish religious and cultural life in Europe including calls, legislations and judgments that support a ban on Jewish circumcision and productions of kosher meat.”

Herzog added that he urged those present “to use all of the tools at your disposal to ensure that European Jews can live an open, free and secure Jewish life.” He pledged too that “Israel will always be a home for you and will always be by your side.”

The survey was commissioned by the Action and Protection League, the EJA’s partner organization, and conducted in cooperation with Ipsos, led by Professor András Kovács of Central European University.

Photo : Antisemitic graffiti on a house in the historic center of Lyon in France. Photo: Twitter

[Further reading about FORB in the EU on HRWF website](#)

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