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Jews are at risk in Germany, says Jewish council

DW (26.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2QtioBa> - Josef Schuster, the head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, told the *Welt am Sonntag* newspaper that the security situation for Jews in the country has worsened in the past few years.

"On the whole I don't tend to dramatize, but the situation has by and large really deteriorated," Schuster said on Sunday.

"It has been the case for a while now that Jews are at risk in some major cities if recognizable as Jews," he added.

The kippah debate

Schuster was weighing in on a debate triggered by [Berlin's anti-Semitism commissioner's warning](#) that the Jewish community in Germany should avoid donning yarmulkes, the traditional Jewish head coverings for males, in some public spaces.

"I cannot advise Jews to wear the kippah everywhere all the time in Germany," Felix Klein said in an interview carried by the Funke media group on Saturday, using another word for yarmulke. The German official said he had "changed his mind (on the subject) compared to previously."

"It is to be welcomed if this situation receives more attention at the highest political level," Schuster said of Klein's warning.

The number of attacks against Jews in Germany increased from 1,504 in 2017 to 1,646 in 2018 — a rise of 10%. The number of reported cases of violence against Jews rose from 37 to 62 over the same period, according to official figures.

Last year, a man wearing the Star of David was beaten down and kicked right in the center of Berlin. Some weeks earlier, a similar incident in Germany's capital caused public outrage and sparked a nationwide debate on anti-Semitism when a 19-year-old Syrian attacked an Arab-Israeli and his companion with a belt in broad daylight. Both victims wore yarmulkes in what was an allegedly anti-Semitic attack.

Anti-Semitism surge

Clarifying his comments, Klein said that he wanted to start a debate about the safety of Jews in Germany.

"I deliberately wanted to initiate a debate on the security of the Jewish community in our country," he said. "Of course there cannot be no-go areas for Jews or members of other minorities anywhere in Germany."

After several high-profile incidents of anti-Semitic violence, Germany's Jewish community appealed to the government to institute an anti-Semitism oath for groups seeking public funding.

Analysts say the rise of far-right political groups in Germany has also contributed to anti-Semitism in the country. Parties like Alternative for Germany (AfD) openly question Germany's culture of atonement for World War II. Some experts also attribute the new wave of anti-Semitism to the arrival of millions of asylum-seekers, mainly from Muslim-majority countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Klein said Saturday that "the lifting of inhibitions and the uncouthness which is on the rise in society" are factors behind the recent anti-Semitic wave.

"The internet and social media have largely contributed to this — but so have constant attacks against our culture of remembrance," he added.

A 'capitulation to anti-Semitism'

Meanwhile, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin took to Twitter to express his concern about Klein's comments.

"The statement of the German government's anti-Semitism commissioner ... shocked me deeply," Rivlin wrote on Twitter.

"We acknowledge and appreciate the moral position of the government of Germany and its commitment to the Jewish community that lives there," Rivlin said, "but fears about the security of German Jews are a capitulation to anti-Semitism and an admittance that, again, Jews are not safe on German soil."

On Saturday, Germany's Justice Minister Katarina Barley told the *Handelsblatt* newspaper the surge in anti-Semitic attacks was "shameful for our country" but added that the police were "vigilant."

Which cult is governing Munich?

In the German city of Munich, and also at the level of the State of Bavaria, the authorities still use what they call "sect filters". Any institutions which are supported, funded, or depend on the government are recommended to enforce the completion of a Scientology-questionnaire

By Georges Elia Sarfati

New Europe (22.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2HFktqY> - Is Germany, in 2019, really the democratic state we believe it to be? Are freedom of conscience and expression respected by the authorities as most Europeans think? There is every reason to believe that this is not the case when we consider the poor faith trials, as well as the discrimination suffered by the followers or sympathisers of the Church of Scientology whose inspiration and value system have their source in the thought and work of the writer L. Ron Hubbard.

The facts that have been reported to me – proven facts and each one verifiable – have nothing of an anecdotal tone – they are the fruits of a system. In the State of Bavaria, for many years now, several public organisations, but also private companies, have demanded during the hiring process that candidates sign a form stating that they are not members of the Church of Scientology – neither followers nor supporters. The same applies to the granting of funds to individuals.

Otherwise, the jobs they claim, or the public support to which they may be entitled, are simply refused. For its part, the Church of Scientology has not failed to react to these discriminatory practices by taking legal action in the context of Germany's labour laws. In each case, the case ended with the formal determination that the practice was categorically deemed illegal. Unfortunately, the rule of law is one thing whilst the use and the habit are another. Despite these judicial decisions, discrimination of job seekers or subsidy seekers with links to Scientology remains a common practice.

It is shocking to see that a suspicion of spiritual and cultural belonging, in the heart of Europe – home of the Enlightenment – can still hit a group of people because of their opinions, their religion, or their beliefs. It is even more shocking to note that this kind of suspicion is notably cultivated by the Municipality of Munich.

In the past, there were nation decrees and laws that institutionalised this type of witch hunt. We thought we had completely left behind such totalitarian actions, but it turns out that they do not belong only to National Socialism or Stalinist Communism.

Has Bavaria, once known for its strong pro-Nazi tradition, not overcome this shameful tradition of quarantining a minority? As a Franco-Israeli scholar, I wonder about the persistence of ways that defeat the idea of a Europe with tolerance and equality.

So here I am in the role of Voltaire, ready to defend an opinion that is not his own: the banishment of a minority has always been a bad precursor for the vitality of a country where the defence of the rights of the individual should be now taken for granted. When the traits of a dictatorial policy are insinuated into the mentality, professional or civic, everyone is at risk of suffering this kind of attack one day.

The worst breaches of public liberties do not always prosper at a safe distance from the "civilised world," the worst injustices often occur before our eyes, without anyone wanting to pay attention to them. By conformism? By the spirit of prejudice? By passivity?

Discrimination of individuals is not an abstract notion, it is a silent process that leads to exclusion, marginalisation, and stigmatisation. Exclusion, in this case, targets people who are at risk of unemployment. The economic and social marginalisation that this situation often entails is a factor of desocialisation. As for the stigmatisation that results, it is to banish those who are the object of this double indignity.

This state of affairs questions the true motives of these breaches of the law as much as of public morals. Prejudice is tenacious, it breeds fear, and justifies violence. Institutional violence is often the first step towards criminalising the group that suffers.

There is no need to be a genius to know that in terms of Scientology's appreciation, it is ignorance of its ethical foundations – of its universalism and its moral aspirations – that is the cause of the continuation of the damage.

To call the existence the way of thinking and the way of life of a group "sectarian" or "cultish" aims to bring it into the disrepute of criminalisation.

In Europe, the charge of sectarianism is today a tool of lobbies who act themselves according to the methods they impute to their designated victims. Here again, the fact is known. And this effect of criminalisation is a machine to fabricate adversity. What I see is that at least in this case the judges are ahead of the public opinion. It is up to those who have the responsibility to "make" an opinion or to "enlighten" it, not to get bogged down in an inexplicable delay.

It is only a matter of learning a little about the plurality of emerging cultural trends, not to agitate, in each case, the spectre of "sectarian excesses". Any self-respecting tradition has first erupted into history as a sectarian activity: starting with primitive Christianity, not to say anything about Islam. It has been a long time since Scientology was no longer a cult in the sense that is claimed: only its detractors fan the flames, with the spirit of malicious continuation, of which we are aware.

The media, which have such an important role to play in updating the public's knowledge, is careful not to report on the progress of research in the field of "new religious movements". We can only advise them that they, for example, agree to be interested in the work of reliable scholarly initiatives, such as the Center for the Study of New Religions.

They would learn a lot about finally coming out of the darkness.

Anti-Semitic crime in Germany up, amid uptick in hate crimes

By David Rising

AP News (14.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2QaWbb6> - The number of anti-Semitic and anti-foreigner incidents rose in Germany last year, despite an overall drop in politically motivated crimes, according to statistics released Tuesday.

The Interior Ministry's latest annual report on politically motivated crimes showed that anti-Semitic incidents rose 19.6% to 1,799 from 1,504 in 2017, with 69 classified as acts of violence.

Of the total, 1,603 were committed by far-right perpetrators, while 102 and 52 respectively were listed as crimes committed out of "foreign ideological" or "religious ideological" grounds.

Events characterized as anti-foreigner crimes increased 19.7% to 7,701 amid an overall uptick in hate crimes to 8,113 from 7,913. The far-right was responsible for 7,064 of the anti-foreigner crimes, and 7,153 of the overall hate crimes, according to the report.

Germany defines politically motivated crimes as those that constitute a particular threat to the country's democracy. They include a wide range of crimes, including acts by political extremists and animal rights activists that deliver their message physically..

Overall, the report showed Germany registered 36,062 politically motivated crimes in 2018, down 8.7% from 2017. The majority, 39.1%, were classified as "propaganda" crimes, such as using the swastika and other banned symbols. Others crimes motivated by politics included threats, incitement, disturbing the peace, arson, assault, kidnapping and murder.

Holger Muench, head of the Federal Criminal Police Office, said it was good news that politically motivated crimes were down overall but "of particular concern" to see a rise in reported hate crimes.

Right-wing crimes made up most of the incidents at 20,431, down 0.4%. Of those, 1,156 involved violence, a 2.3% increase from a year earlier.

Left-wing crimes dropped 18.4% to 7,961 incidents. Of those, 1,340 were violent, a decline of 31.9% from 2017. More than half of the violent offenses were against police.

Crimes committed for reasons of religious ideology dropped 46.9% to 586, with a strong drop in the number of suspects accused of membership in a terrorist organization from 316 to 144.

Still, the Interior Ministry warned that Germany remains "a focus of Islamic terrorists and Islamic terrorism remains a large danger for its internal security."

Authorities also recorded a sharp increase of 53.8% of crimes committed for "foreign ideological" grounds, from 1,617 to 2,487, primarily attributed to a spike in strife between groups from Turkey involved in conflicts in their home country, including the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK.

"Germany is a sounding board for conflicts around the world, in particular the crisis regions in the Mideast," said Interior Minister Horst Seehofer. "The state will continue to do everything possible to ensure foreign terrorist or extremist organizations do not use Germany for their actions. That applies especially for the PKK."

German court sides with Scientologist following his dismissal from Munich art house

New Europe (02.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2JmKcFN> - Discriminatory practices known as "sect filters" are widely used in Germany, particularly in Bavaria, to prevent Scientologists from occupying government functions or obtaining a service contract from any state, city, or local community agency.

"Sect filters" are questionnaires or surveys that are to be filled out by employment or service contract candidates, allegedly to certify that they are not Scientologists and have not ever attended a course in what they termed "L. Ron Hubbard Technology".

The use of such Filter has been declared illegal by several Bavarian Labour Court decisions, but the state government in Bavaria continues to insist on its use.

In March 2017, former SPD Bavarian State MP Isabell Zacharias led a campaign against the personnel director at the Munich House of Art, or *Haus Der Kunst*, had his relationship with the well-known institution terminated after 22 years. His religious affiliation to Scientology was known by the management for years and had never been an issue.

By later 2015, the members of the House of Art's Workers Council began a concerted campaign to have him dismissed by making his Scientology membership an issue for both the management and its supervisory board, which is headed by the Bavarian State Minister of Culture.

After Bavaria's culture minister was allegedly found to have been negligent in his duties in February 2017 when an internal investigation revealed that the unnamed Scientologist was still working for *Haus Der Kunst*, the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution – Germany's domestic security agency – placed the *Haus Der Kunst* staff

under surveillance in order to find out if there were any other Scientologists that had been being employed.

Though the House of Art's management had been aware of the religious affiliation of the former personnel director, who had an unblemished performance record that dated back more than two decades, various politicians exerted pressure on the *Haus Der Kunst* after it had initially refused to comply with the drive to have the personnel director removed, the Scientologist was abruptly terminated in March 2017.

Prior to being dismissed, he had received the backing of two managers of the *Haus Der Kunst* as well as dozens of employees who publicly protested the decision shortly after he was sacked. This prompted the by-then fired Scientologist to file a formal complaint with Munich's Labor Court, which on 3 April upheld the religious freedom law under the German Constitution and ruled that the personnel director's dismissal was unjustified.

The leadership of the House of Art has since settled, and will pay the plaintiff €110,000 in severance as well as provide him with a full pension. The press office contacted New Europe, commenting that,

The labor court procedure with the former personnel administrator was terminated on 3 April 2019 at the Labor Court of Munich by a settlement. The termination of the former personnel administrator is effective as of 31.3.2017.

For 25 years of employment, the former HR administrator receives a severance payment for the period from the date of termination to the completion of the procedure. The compensation is based on the salary of a HR Administrator and is within the normal scope. Further demands of the former personnel administrator for damages and compensation for pain has rejected the court.

By accepting the settlement by both sides, the procedure is now legally closed.

Bavarian court upholds headscarf ban for judges, prosecutors

Deutsche Welle (19.03.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2WMIzoL> - Bavaria's constitutional court has confirmed the legitimacy of the southern German state's ban on judges and prosecutors wearing headscarves. It said the presence of crosses in courtrooms was another matter altogether.

The Bavarian constitutional court on Monday rejected an appeal by an Islamic religious community to overturn [a ban on judges and prosecutors wearing headscarves](#), saying that justice officials in particular were obliged to be neutral in questions of religion and ideology.

The judge voiced the opinion that the ban, which also forbids officials to wear religious symbols such as crosses or a kippa — or yarmulke — during court proceedings, did not go against laws on religious freedom or equality.

Cross controversy

The Islamic group had argued that the ban violated both laws, as the Christian symbol of the cross [hangs in Bavarian courtrooms](#).

This argument was not accepted by the court, which maintained that the presence of crosses was a different matter, as it was determined by the court administration and cast no doubt on the neutrality of individual judges or lawyers.

The court also said the ban did not discriminate against women, as other items of clothing with religious significance that were worn by men were also forbidden.

Read more: [Unveiling the history of the headscarf](#)

Long debate

The issue of the wearing of headscarves by Muslim women, particularly public servants, has been the subject of debate in Germany for many years.

In another contribution to this debate, the deputy chairman of the conservative CDU/CSU bloc in the German parliament, Carsten Linnemann, has renewed a recently oft-heard call for a Germany-wide headscarf ban for girls under 14.

Girls should be able to grow up with the same freedoms as boys, Linnemann told daily *Rheinische Post* in an interview published on Monday. The politician has recently co-edited an anthology entitled "Political Islam Does Not Belong in Germany" and is part of a group promoting tougher integration policies.

Controversial plan

Last year, the government of Germany's most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia, put forward [a plan to introduce a law banning girls under 14 from wearing headscarves](#) at school by the end of 2019.

Critics of the headscarf say that it is a symbol for what they see as the oppression of Muslim women and that it can denote an adherence to more fundamentalist beliefs. Others see any ban on the headwear as an unlawful infringement of personal rights, with some seeing criticism of the garment as an indication of a deeper-lying anti-Islam sentiment.

Anti-Semitism: Germany sees '10% jump in offences' in 2018

The German government has revealed a sharp increase in the number of anti-Semitic offences recorded last year.

BBC (13.02.2019) - <https://bbc.in/2IetS1e> - Crime data, detailed in German media on Wednesday, says 1,646 crimes were linked to a hatred of Jews in 2018 - showing a yearly increase of 10%.

It comes just a day after French politicians spoke out about a sharp rise of incidents in their own country.

French Interior minister, Christophe Castaner, has warned that anti-Semitism is "spreading like poison".

Over the weekend there were a series of anti-Semitic incidents reported in central Paris - including Swastika vandalism on post-boxes featuring a holocaust survivor's portrait.

The latest data from Germany was released after a request from a member of the far-left Die Linke party. **That information was then shared with German newspaper, Der Tagesspiegel.**

The government have said the final totals may still increase - but the latest collation of data revealed a total jump in anti-Semitic offences of about 10%.

It also revealed a 60% rise in physical attacks - with 62 violent incidents recorded, up from 37 in 2017.

Josef Shcuster, the head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said the news shows that government action is "urgently needed".

"The latest numbers are not yet official, but at least they reflect a tendency - and that's scary," he said in a statement to the BBC.

"What had already solidified as a subjective impression among Jews is now confirmed in the statistics.

"Considering that acts below the threshold for criminal liability are not covered, the picture becomes even darker."

Jewish groups have warned about the rise of far-right groups in fostering anti-Semitism and hatred of other minorities throughout Europe.

Last year, **a survey of thousands of European Jews revealed that many were increasingly worried about anti-Semitism.**

Since 2017, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) have been country's main opposition party.

AfD are openly against immigration, but deny holding anti-Semitic views.

However, a number of **comments from their politicians, including about the Holocaust, have drawn scorn from Jewish groups** and other politicians.

Last year the German government announced that a specialist team would be sent into German schools to try and combat anti-Semitism.

There have also been calls for special classes about anti-Semitism to be provided for some immigrants.

The Central Council of Jews in Germany said the classes were needed after a large increased in immigration from Muslim-majority countries.

It came after a video went viral showing a man, shouting in Arabic, attacking two Jewish men in Berlin.

Last month, Chancellor Angela Merkel has said it was the responsibility of everyone to have a "zero tolerance" approach to anti-Semitism and other forms of xenophobia.

"People growing up today must know what people were capable of in the past, and we must work proactively to ensure that it is never repeated," Merkel during a video address to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

Home education: Court rules against German Christian family

German parents whose four children were taken into care because they refused to send them to school did not have their human rights breached, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has ruled.

BBC (10.01.2019) - <https://bbc.in/2Cq2L6T> - Home education is banned in Germany but the Wunderlich family, from Darmstadt, who are Christian, wished to educate their children in this way.

Their four children were taken into care for three weeks in 2013.

Afterwards the parents took their case to the ECHR in Strasbourg,

They claimed their right to respect for private and family life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights had been breached.

But the court has now ruled that taking the children into care was justified.

The ECHR said officials in Darmstadt, near Frankfurt, were reasonable in assuming the parents had "endangered their children by not sending them to school".

"Based on the information available at the time, the domestic authorities had reasonably assumed that the children were isolated, had had no contact with anyone outside of the family, and that a risk to their physical integrity had existed," the court added.

In a statement released through the religious advocacy group ADF International, the father, Dirk Wunderlich, described the court's ruling as "disheartening".

"After years of legal struggles, this is extremely frustrating for us and our children," he said. "It is upsetting that the European Court of Human Rights has not recognised the injustices we have suffered at the hands of the German authorities."

The family are now considering appealing the decision, by taking their case to the Grand Chamber of the ECHR.

'Unwanted influences'

The lengthy dispute began in 2005, when the parents - who are deeply religious - refused to enroll their eldest daughter at school.

Home-schooling is essentially banned in Germany, except for in very rare circumstances - such as severe illness, or if the child's parents are diplomats.

But the parents argued that even Christian private schools could leave their children exposed to "unwanted influences".

The couple was repeatedly issued with fines, and even had criminal proceedings brought against them. However, they simply paid off the fines and continued educating their children at home.

Police eventually seized the children from their parents' home in Darmstadt on 29 August 2013.

Authorities claimed the children were growing up in a "parallel world", and that they would struggle to become part of the community and learn crucial social skills, such as tolerance.

The children were temporarily moved into care for three weeks between August and September 2013, and were enrolled in school for a year until 2014.

After that year was up, the parents took their children out of school again.

European court rules against German homeschooling family

The court found that German authorities did not violate the parental rights of the Wunderlich family by forcing their children to attend school. Homeschooling has been illegal in Germany since 1919.

By Andrea Grunau and Elizabeth Schumacher

DW (10.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Mmnr1Z> - The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on Thursday ruled against a German family from the state of Hesse that has been fighting for years for the right to homeschool their children, a practice that is illegal in Germany.

The Wunderlich family had argued that the government had violated Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees protection for the privacy of home and family life, by forcing their four children to attend a local school.

The court found, however, that the family had not provided sufficient evidence that the children were properly educated and socialized, and that a government removing children from their parents to ensure they receive an education did not violate Article 8.

In their ruling, the ECHR also noted the troubling statement by father Dirk Wunderlich that implied children were the "property" of their parents.

"The authorities...have a duty to protect children," due to "reasonably held concerns," the court noted.

'The most horrible day'

"August 29, 2013, as 40 officials stood before our door, was the most horrible day for us," Dirk Wunderlich told DW. He said the authorities were contacted by neighbors who claimed he had said he would rather kill his children than send them to school.

"What nonsense," said Wunderlich, calling the accusations "invented." Their children were returned to them after three weeks.

Wunderlich and his wife, Petra, are both gardeners, who themselves graduated from a normal high school, which they attended "not reluctantly," Dirk said.

But school has changed since his day, Wunderlich has argued. He believes that now, teachers do less in the classroom and expect children to do most of their work and learning as homework anyway. He further emphasized that he and his wife taught their children with the assistance of a Christian distance-learning school, and had offered to have the relevant authorities check up on them at any time.

He has disputed the allegations that his offspring were not properly socialized, highlighting their participation in various clubs and organizations. He added that he believed the family circle to be the best environment for children.

Dirk Wunderlich said they had considered moving to an EU country in which homeschooling is legal, such as France, but he said they were not allowed to move as they didn't have full custody of the children at that time.

Rare exceptions for homeschooling ban

Obligatory schooling has been part of German law continuously since 1919, and is enshrined in several state constitutions as well.

"A general exemption from compulsory education for pedagogical or religious reasons is not allowed," the Conference of German Culture Ministers (KMK) told DW. The rare exceptions are for severe illnesses, the children of diplomats, and in rare instances for working children, such as child actors.

The KMK said it believes there are between 500 and 1,000 cases of parents homeschooling their children across Germany.

While private schooling exists in Germany, it is far less common than in many other countries; German private schools also broadly follow the curriculum of the state where they're based.