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The EU must take a stand on Islam as well as the refugee situation

Europe is in a paradoxical situation. The tragic challenges that shook Europe in 2015 should have encouraged it to pursue greater political unity and to initiate a debate on Islam. However, the fight against "Islamic terrorism" and the admission of refugees are creating feelings of fear and insecurity, which are pushing people in the opposite direction.

Foundation for European Progressive Studies (02.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1Y1K4tK> - On the one hand, in Europe, xenophobia and racism fuel the idea that the European Union should shut itself in and become a fortress cut off from the rest of the world. On the other hand, there are the migration flows. They cannot be stopped, but must be controlled using the maximum foresight required to avoid serious social, cultural and religious consequences. That is the future of Europe.

More and more, Europe is becoming a multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multicultural, multilingual society. But if Europe is not capable of building a sustainable cohabitation space, it calls into question the very existence of the European Union project, and going beyond that, the source of our nations' wealth: the cultural heritage upon which our values are based.

That is why, when refugees leave their country, with its war and bombings, there is first of all a moral duty, a duty of dignity that reminds us of our citizenship, which is not just there for our own protection. Unfortunately, it was the photo of a dead child on a beach in Turkey that really caused significant numbers of Europeans to begin to collectively grasp the scope of the refugees' plight. Unfortunately, that momentum was lost. Commission officials are still unable to compensate for the European Council's lack of political vision, although there appears to have been some progress, with the idea that the so-called Dublin regulation – the EU law that determines that the management of refugees is a national issue – belongs to a past century.

Security, yes, but what about beyond that?

It isn't that we are not concerned about the security of our fellow citizens. An effective strategy must be developed for peace in Syria, for stability in Libya and to stamp out the

fascism of "Islamic State", but looking beyond that, what is the political strategy? The forces deployed since the attacks on November the 13th and the state of emergency are the means, but what is the end?

It isn't that we are not concerned about the security of our fellow citizens, but we must not forget that education and social diversity are sustainable and essential elements for establishing peace and for living together.

We must not forget that the European Union was created so that nations that were fighting each other could live and grow old together in peace. We regret the lack of European response from Brussels and European vision from our political leaders, but we also have reason to ask ourselves: does European awareness currently exist among the citizens of the twenty-eight member states?

Islam in Europe

At the same time, we must discuss an issue that has never been addressed. What is Islam in Europe? Where do these "lunatics," who are not refugees, but European citizens, come from? Why are Jews, Christians, Muslims and atheists incapable of living together peacefully - and, on the other hand, how can Islamophobia be dealt with?

Recently, at a conference in which we both participated, one of the audience members, a veiled Belgian Muslim woman of Moroccan origin, spoke of the pressure she felt at having to defend herself with regard to what is happening with "Islamic State," because for her, those people are not Muslims.

It would be too simple to say that they have nothing to do with Islam. It would be a little like venturing to suggest that Stalinism was not communism. From a strictly Islamic and religious point of view, they are Muslims, although their behaviour is obviously not consistent with the principles of Islam. However, they oblige us morally and intellectually to take a stand on what they do. They force Muslims to distance themselves from their rhetoric, which condemns everyone but themselves to hell.

A religious response is needed, but not just a religious response. Although it is of course easier to recruit from the margins of society, with high levels of poverty and unemployment, studies show that the terrorists involved in New York, London, Beirut and Paris had very often fallen into extremist violence after a religious commitment of just a few weeks, and this was true regardless of their academic background or social class. There is therefore a real problem in regard to education, manipulation, internet indoctrination, drug use and political exploitation of religious matters.

The need for a European Islam

Our Muslim fellow citizens are at the front line in the fight against violent extremism, because they are its primary victims. However, we must all fight this political, cultural and social battle together. Paradoxically, Muslim extremists and European Islamophobes share the same idea that "Islam equals violence." This perception is not only false, but also dangerous.

To escape from this unfounded ideology, we need a European Islam, an Islam of European citizens and not an Islam composed of communities influenced by their countries of origin. We need an Islam inspired by minds that are open to change and the challenges of the modern era, rejecting a literal reading of the Qur'an and in tune with the new historical context. That kind of Islam would make an important contribution to European culture in the 21st century and beyond. It would also be a powerful antidote to the religious fanaticism that exists in all religions and, at the same time, constitute a response to the rigid, ultra-conservative Islam, occasionally proclaimed by some terrorist groups.

If Muslims share responsibility for the emergence of this European Islam, the EU Member States and their institutions will have to recognise that Islam is a European religion and that its contribution is necessary and important.

Pseudo-Christian nationalism in Europe

By Alfiaz Vaiya for Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (17.09.2015) - The opening of Europe's borders can be categorised as the awakening of Europe's moral conscience with governments, civil society and the public rallying to help refugees. Religious groups have played an important role and have been at the forefront of calls to give sanctuary to those coming to Europe. The Church for example, as one of the largest providers of public services such as schools and hospitals, has played a crucial role in Germany opening its borders. The Church has always been a champion of unpopular causes. Moreover its ability to mobilise followers and form social movements has often resulted in its persecution.

However, the Church's positive contribution to our societies is overshadowed by the politicisation of Christianity by political leaders. In June, Viktor Orban, said "A modern day mass migration is taking place around the world that could change the face of Europe's civilisation ... if that happens, that's irreversible, there is no way back from a multicultural Europe. Neither to a Christian Europe, nor to a world of national cultures." Political leaders such as Viktor Orban are trying to increase their Christian nationalist support base whilst conveniently diverting public attention from the real problems that they are either unwilling or unable to fix.

The ill-conceived actions of these political leaders may bode well with some parts of the electorate. But their actions are un-Christian like and contradict the Gospel. Isaiah 58:7 says "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

Their actions are also similar to those perpetuated by political leaders of Muslim majority countries. Many of those leaders consolidate power and obtain legitimacy by labelling Christianity as a 'threat' to Islam. In Iran the Iranian/American Pastor, Saeed Abedini, was sentenced to eight years in prison for "threatening national security and undermining the Iranian government" because he created a network of Christian house churches.

Just like leaders in Muslim majority countries, Pseudo-Christian nationalist leaders in Europe are playing a dangerous and reactionary game by using religion to whip up fear and consolidate power.

They are also tarnishing the good work done by Christians all over Europe and distorting Christianity to mask their true nationalistic intentions.

Counter violent extremism through inclusion, education and respect, says EP Conference

By Beatrice Basaldella for Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (29.04.2015) - The Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (S&D Group) organised a conference on 21st April at the European Parliament on countering violent extremism. Contributions included many speakers from European institutions, academics, journalists and various associations, all united around one common message: it is only through the promotion of human rights, integration and education that violent extremism can be fought in Europe.

Gianni Pittella, the President of the S&D Group, appealed for an immediate and comprehensive response to extremism, adding that Europe's security cannot be achieved by just building a wall across the Mediterranean. Bringing people together around democratic values, he said, must be at the centre of a strategic response to violent extremism. Tanja Fajon, Vice-president of S&D Group, said that the root causes of extremism, such as religious intolerance, lack of political freedoms and violations of human rights, likewise need to be addressed. "Europe has to demonstrate emotional intelligence and try to understand why people embrace extremist ideologies," she said. Indeed, Professor Preben Bertelsen of Aarhus University in Denmark underlined that harsh exclusionary measures implemented by some Member States to combat illegal activism can backfire into further radicalisation.

Stavros Lambrinidis, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, echoed this point by summarising ten principles and values which should inspire actions to fight extremism. "Violence can never be justified," he stated, and it must be condemned, especially by religious and political leaders. Even still, education, open societies and freedom of speech must be promoted in each state in its own way. Military actions aimed at fighting terrorism must be used only as a last resort and in full respect of human rights. "Human rights have always been the universal language against those who want to divide us," he said. This is "a battle within cultures, not against cultures," commented Lambrinidis.

Lambrinidis' address introduced one of the main topics for debate: Why are European citizens choosing to take up arms to fight for the so-called Islamic State? Peter R. Neumann, Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalism (www.icsr.info), described what motivates these foreign fighters. Many feel that they have no stake in EU society. The importance of peer relations in the radicalisation and recruitment processes should also be noted, he said. This is accentuated through the use of social media.

Latifa Ibn Ziaten works with youth through an association she created in 2012 after her son Imad was killed in Toulouse. Everyone can play an active role in any European society, she stressed, including Muslims. But we must listen to Muslim youth, provide support for difficult family situations, school assistance and even psychological help, when needed. A Belgian woman, Hayat Khyare, spoke about discriminatory laws which divide people, such as the prohibition to wear the headscarf, which led her sister to conclude that she had no place in European society. The sister left her home in Belgium to go fight with Da'ish in the Middle East.

The event also accentuated the important role of women and mothers in preventing the recruitment of their sons and daughters for terrorism. Educative and financial tools must be provided and promoted to empower youth, combat alienation, marginalisation and social exclusion, said Malika Hamidi of the EU Muslim Network.

"Youths need the hope that they can succeed and politicians have the responsibility to provide them the opportunities in order to do so... independently from their background everyone can have a place in European society," commented Alfzal Khan, the Muslim MEP representing North West England. The central message of the conference was clear: exclusion leads to radicalisation, illegal activities and extremist positions. It is only

through education, integration, protection of freedom of religion or belief and the respect of human rights that we can fight extremism and not through further violence.

It is our antipathy towards migrants that kills in the Mediterranean

Despite thousands of tragic drownings, European politicians will struggle to navigate past anti-immigration status quo

The Guardian (19.04.2015) http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/19/it-is-our-antipathy-towards-migrants-that-kills-in-the-mediterranean?CMP=share_btn_fbn - Another day, [another death trap in the Mediterranean](#). We thought 2014 was bad: a record death toll, a surge in arrivals on European shores – and notably record numbers saved by the Italian search-and-rescue mission that plied 30,000 square miles of sea, fishing hundreds out of the water every day.

But now Europe is bracing for worse. Far worse. The Italian mercy mission [disbanded last October](#), arguing that no one else in Europe was helping, least of all with the cost of saving lives which amounted to around €9m (£6.5m) a month. In its place, a far more limited EU force popped up, with one-third of the budget, fewer vessels and manpower, and crucially a mission statement that does not extend to search-and-rescue. The upshot: a 50-fold increase in deaths so far this year. Last year more than 3,000 died. This year more than 1,500 have already perished. And the summer migration “season” has barely begun.

The causes are complex. The numbers of people – men, women and children – desperate to move north has risen drastically over the past 10 years, as war carves its way through countries such as Syria, Iraq, Central African Republic and South Sudan, and economic atrophy grips the sclerotic Mediterranean rim and troubled states further south such as Eritrea. More than 120,000 Syrians have arrived in [Europe](#) since 2011. Almost 30,000 Eritreans entered Italy in 2014.

The routes to supposed safety have forked and forked again: you can try your luck from Turkey into Greece and up into the Balkans, around to northern Egypt or, as the vast majority do, through the lawless funnel that Libya has become. But no matter where you start, most itineraries require a sea passage. And the people who facilitate this are ruthless traffickers who don't even expect to get their boats back, still less provide a crew or skipper.

A fishing vessel of the type that sank at the weekend might cost \$10,000 (£6,700). But 600 passengers squashed into space for perhaps 200, each of them paying a minimum of \$1,000 provides a handsome earnings multiple – a return on investment of almost 6,000%.

The standard operating model used to involve overpacking the boats, leaving them bobbing on the water with no crew in the hope the Italians would pick them up. Without the Italians, that model is fatally flawed.

While survivors are ferried to the relative safety of islands such as Lampedusa and Sicily, and victims disappear for ever, the impact of these tragedies will reverberate as far as Brussels, where the EU stands accused of dereliction of duty. The United Nations has [repeatedly urged Europe](#) to be more active in its response to the huge displacements of

people on its southern flank, instead of responding with a drawbridge-like mentality. Only Germany and Sweden, for instance, have taken significant numbers of Syrian refugees displaced by that country's war.

Europe as a whole tends to prefer floating controversial ideas such as putting the onus for dealing with migrants – on land and at sea – on the north African countries [through which they pass](#).

Immigration is a toxic issue in just about every European country. Privately, some officials fear that an enhanced search-and-rescue operation in the Mediterranean will not just deplete threadbare budgets, but act as a "pull factor" that will encourage and facilitate record levels of migrant arrivals on to a continent that has made it clear it wants no more boat people.

Despite the steady drip-drip of death, the Mediterranean story has yet to resonate with a European public short on empathy: Guardian stories on migration on our website consistently attract very low numbers of readers.

Could 2015 be the year that this changes? EU leaders will come under intense pressure this week to change tack, do something, perhaps reinstate search and rescue, certainly explain more what is meant by "working with third countries", as a European commission statement said on Sunday.

But the sad fact remains that until public opinion cares more about children drowning at sea than it does about immigrants settling next door, politicians will be loth to take a lead.

Refugees don't need our tears. They need us to stop making them refugees

The Guardian (17.04.2015)

http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/17/refugees-eu-policy-migrants-how-many-deaths?CMP=share_btn_tw In the desert, the smugglers lace their water with petrol so the smuggled won't gulp it down and cost more. Sometimes the trucks they're packed into stall crossing the Sahara; they have to jump out to push, and some are left behind when the trucks drive off again. In transit camps in [Libya](#) before the perilous venture across the Blue Desert, they play football, fight, and pool their scanty resources so an even poorer friend can pay his way. One man says his tiny wooden boat was flanked by dolphins as they made the journey, three on each side, like guardian angels, and this was what gave him hope.

These are the people we are allowing to die in the Mediterranean. The EU's de facto policy is to let migrants drown to stop others coming. Last year nearly four thousand bodies were recovered from the Med. Those are just the ones we found. The total number of [arrivals in Italy in 2014 went up over 300%](#) from the year before, to more than 170,000. And the EU's response, driven by the cruellest British government in living memory, was to [cut the main rescue operation, Mare Nostrum](#).

The inevitable result is that 500 people have already died this year. The figure for the equivalent period in 2014 was 15. There are half a million people in Libya waiting to make the crossing. How many more deaths can we stomach?

[Migration](#) illustrates one of the signal features of modern life, which is malice by proxy. Like drones and derivatives, migration policy allows the powerful to inflict horrors on the powerless without getting their hands dirty. James Brokenshire, the minister who defended cutting Mare Nostrum on the nauseatingly hypocritical grounds that it encouraged migration, never has to let the deaths his decision helped to cause spoil his expensive lunch with lobbyists. It doesn't affect him.

But it does affect us. Right now we are a diminished and reduced society, bristling with suspicion and distrust of others even as we perversely struggle with loneliness and alienation. We breathe the toxic smog of hatred towards immigrants pumped out by Nigel Farage and [Katie Hopkins](#), and it makes us lesser people.

Forget the fact that this society wouldn't work without migrants, that nobody else will pick your vegetables and make your latte and get up at 4am to clean your office. Forget the massive tax contribution made by migrants to the Treasury. This is not about economics. Far too often, even the positive takes on migration are driven by numbers and finance, by "What can they do for us?". This is about two things: compassion and responsibility.

[Lampedusa](#), my play currently running at the Soho Theatre, focuses on two people at the sharp end of austerity Europe. Stefano is a coastguard whose job is to fish dead migrants out of the sea. Denise is a collector for a payday loan company. They're not liberals. They don't like the people they deal with. They can't afford to. As Stefano says: "You try to keep them at arm's length. There's too many of them. And it makes you think, about the randomness of I get to walk these streets, and he doesn't. The ground becomes ocean under your feet."

Migration illustrates one of the signal features of modern life: malice by proxy

But eventually, the human impact of what they do breaks through. And in their consequent struggles, both Stefano and Denise are aided by a friendship, reluctant and questioning, with someone they formerly thought of as a burden. This is compassion not as a lofty feeling for someone beneath you, but as the raw reciprocal necessity of human beings who have nothing but each other. This is where we are in the utterly corrupted, co-opted politics of the early 21st century. The powerful don't give a shit. All we have is us.

But equally important is responsibility. In all the rage about migration, one thing is never discussed: what we do to *cause* it. A report published this week by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists reveals that the [World Bank displaced a staggering 3.4 million people in the last five years](#). By funding privatisations, land grabs and dams, by backing companies and governments accused of rape, murder and torture, and by putting \$50bn into projects graded highest risk for "irreversible and unprecedented" social impacts, the World Bank has massively contributed to the flow of impoverished people across the globe. The single biggest thing we could do to stop migration is to abolish the development mafia: the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Investment Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

A very close second is to stop bombing the Middle East. The west destroyed the infrastructure of Libya without any clue as to what would replace it. What has is a vacuum state run by warlords that is now the centre of Mediterranean people-smuggling. We're right behind the Sisi regime in Egypt that is eradicating the Arab spring, cracking down on Muslims and privatising infrastructure at a rate of knots, all of which pushes huge numbers of people on to the boats. Our past work in Somalia, Syria and Iraq means those nationalities are top of the migrant list.

Not all migration is caused by the west, of course. But let's have a real conversation about the part that is. Let's have a real conversation about our ageing demographic and the massive skills shortage here, what it means for overstretched public services if we let migrants in (we'd need to raise money to meet increased demand, and the clearest and fairest way is a rise in taxes on the rich), the ethics of taking the cream of the crop from poor countries. Migration is a complex subject. But let's not be cowards and pretend the migrants will stop coming. Because they won't. This will never stop.

Europe's Anti-semitism comes out of the shadows

New York Times (23.09.2014)

http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/09/24/world/europe/europes-anti-semitism-comes-out-of-shadows.html?referrer&post_id=647012412_10152283875587413&r=2 - From the immigrant enclaves of the Parisian suburbs to the drizzly bureaucratic city of Brussels to the industrial heartland of Germany, Europe's old demon returned this summer. "Death to the Jews!" shouted protesters at pro-Palestinian rallies in Belgium and France. "Gas the Jews!" yelled marchers at a similar protest in Germany.

The ugly threats were surpassed by uglier violence. [Four people](#) were [fatally shot in May](#) at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. A Jewish-owned pharmacy in this Paris suburb was destroyed in July by youths protesting Israel's military campaign in Gaza. A synagogue in Wuppertal, Germany, was attacked with firebombs. A Swedish Jew was beaten with iron pipes. The list goes on.

The scattered attacks have raised alarm about how Europe is changing and whether it remains a safe place for Jews. An increasing number of Jews, if still relatively modest in total, are now migrating to Israel. Others describe "no go" zones in Muslim districts of many European cities where Jews dare not travel.

But there is also concern about what some see as an insidious "softer" anti-Jewish bias, which they fear is creeping into the European mainstream and undermining the postwar consensus to root out anti-Semitism. Now the question is whether a subtle societal shift is occurring that has made anti-Jewish remarks or behavior more acceptable.

"The fear is that now things are blatantly being said openly, and no one is batting an eyelid," said Jessica Frommer, 36, a secular Jew who works for a nonprofit organization in Brussels. "Modern Europe is based on stopping what happened in the Second World War. And now 70 years later, people standing near the European Parliament are shouting, 'Death to Jews!'"

This is not the Europe of 1938. French leaders have strongly condemned the violence. Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany this month led a rally against anti-Semitism in Berlin at which she told Germans, "It is our national and civic duty to fight anti-Semitism."

Europe has seen protests and outbursts of anti-Semitism whenever the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has erupted, and some analysts say this summer's anger is a cyclical episode that like others will fade away. Some note that the number of reported anti-Semitic incidents this year in France, for instance, is [well below some years](#) in the 2000s.

Yet as European support for the Palestinian cause and criticism of Israel have hardened, many Jews describe a blurring of distinctions between being anti-Israel and being anti-Jew.

With Europe still shaking from a populist backlash against fiscal austerity, some Jews speak of feeling politically isolated, without an ideological home. Many left-wing political parties are anti-Israel. Many right-wing parties, some with anti-Semitic origins, are extremist and virulently anti-immigrant. And many Jews who have voted with the Socialist Party in France and Belgium worry that those parties are weak and becoming more dependent on fast-growing Muslim voting blocs.

Even among those inclined to condemn racism in any form, fighting anti-Semitism is no longer seen as a priority, with Jews often perceived as privileged compared with Muslims and other minorities confronted with discrimination.

Many younger Muslims often seem alienated in Europe. Struggling to find work and frustrated by their lack of acceptance, a small but vocal group of them has become inflamed by the politics of the Middle East, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

European officials are deeply concerned that radical Islam, nurtured in the Middle East, could take root in Europe. Mehdi Nemmouche, a French Muslim arrested in connection with the killings at the Jewish Museum in Brussels, fought as a jihadist in Syria. A French journalist who was held captive in Syria until April said Mr. Nemmouche had been one of his torturers.

"We are a microcosm of the Middle East," said Philip Carmel, European policy director for the European Jewish Congress. "The Middle East is being imported into Europe."

Visits to some of the flash points of the summer violence revealed a picture of what Prime Minister Manuel Valls of France has called a "new anti-Semitism." In Sarcelles, the Paris suburb where pro-Palestinian protests spiraled into riots, the alienation of France's immigrants and minorities lies just below the surface. In Brussels, the headquarters of the European Union, some secular Jews described a changing atmosphere and questioned whether it was time to leave.

And in Wuppertal, Germany, a city proud of its commitment to religious and ethnic diversity, the attempted firebombing of a synagogue exposed underlying tensions that became even clearer this month when, unexpectedly, a group of Muslim men patrolled a neighborhood wearing makeshift uniforms that said "Shariah Police."

The French melting pot

On the afternoon of July 20, a siege mentality gripped Little Jerusalem, the Jewish commercial district in Sarcelles. A crowd of young Jewish men had gathered at the synagogue as a pro-Palestinian protest was held a few blocks away. France's Interior Ministry had tried to ban the protest, which spun into a riot. Cars were burning. Young men were throwing rocks as the police fired tear gas. A Jewish-owned pharmacy was set on fire.

"We were all concentrated here to defend the synagogue," said Levi Cohen Solal, 21, who joined the human cordon outside the synagogue. "Everybody was scared."

Blocked by the police, the rioters never reached the synagogue, but Sarcelles became a televised symbol of France's new anti-Semitism — a depiction many local residents did not recognize. A working-class suburb where generations of immigrants are packed into government housing, Sarcelles is a melting pot of religions and ethnicities, where many people speak of a largely peaceful coexistence.

To many residents, the demonstration, which was organized by outsiders on social media, was an indictment not of Sarcelles, but of France. Youth unemployment is soaring, especially in immigrant havens like Sarcelles, and many French-born children and grandchildren of immigrants have become alienated from French society.

"They have a real hatred against the state," said Bassi Konaté, a city social worker, who added that many of the protesters came from poorer districts nearby. "A big proportion of these people feel neglected. A lot of these people don't know anything about Gaza. But they want to confront the police."

An early sign that these broader resentments were morphing into more open expressions of anti-Semitism came with the emergence several years ago of [Dieudonné M'bala M'bala](#), a French comedian who lashed out at Jews and played down the Holocaust. He has since allied himself with Jean-Marie Le Pen, the 86-year-old founder of the far-right National Front, who this summer used an apparently anti-Semitic pun, which alluded to Nazi crematories, as a riposte to a Jewish critic. Many of the comedian's shows have since been banned in France, but his popularity has continued to rise, unnerving many Jews.

"For the past four or five years, we have felt a growing insecurity," said David Harroch, who runs a Jewish bookstore in Little Jerusalem. "My customers tell me how worried they are about the climate here, the situation. A lot of people have left."

Israeli officials predict that as many as 6,000 Jews will migrate from France this year, a stark reversal from the 1950s, when Sephardic Jews, Arabs and others began arriving in Sarcelles from North Africa. A booming economy made work plentiful.

But during France's recession in the late 1970s, the city's ethnic groups became pitted against one another for limited public resources. Rahsaan Maxwell, a political scientist who has studied Sarcelles's ethnic groups, said the Sephardic Jews had incurred resentment because they were better organized and able to mobilize politically to win certain perks from the elected local council: a special Jewish section in the local cemetery, widening of a road in front of the main synagogue, kosher offerings at an annual city dinner for the elderly, and segregated swimming hours for men and women at a city pool.

In his 2012 book, "Ethnic Minority Migrants in Britain and France," Mr. Maxwell wrote that Sephardic Jews became so influential that "when Israel was at war with Lebanon in the early 1980s, Sephardic Jewish activists in Sarcelles were aggressive about using it as a litmus test for local politicians to see whether they supported Israel and the Jewish people."

Yet many Jews and Muslims born in that era grew up together without rancor in government housing. Not far from one of the city's storefront mosques is a small Superette grocery owned by a Muslim family. One of the owners, Abdel Badaz, recently stood behind the counter with a childhood friend, Mickaël Berdah, 36, a Jew whose family emigrated decades ago from Tunisia. They both criticized the riot as the work of young troublemakers.

"When you've grown up in the neighborhood, and you know everybody, there isn't that kind of hate," Mr. Berdah said. "When there is that kind of hate, it is at the roots, something about the way parents have educated their children."

Later, near the grocery, a tall teenager pedaled his bicycle toward two journalists and shouted at them to leave, saying the media had lied about Sarcelles. The youth, Diakité

Ismael, 19, the French-born son of Senegalese immigrants, soon calmed down and, like others, argued that there was no animosity in Sarcelles between local Muslims and Jews.

"Look," he said, as a bearded Jewish man in a dark suit and skullcap walked by, "there's one."

But when asked about Gaza, Mr. Ismael became agitated, rambling and warning that the world was hurtling toward a catastrophe. He said he had seen video of an Israeli bomb hitting a funeral in Gaza. "Somehow, some Jews control politics, information, business and finance," he said. "I'm not talking about the Jews here. I'm talking about Jews in general."

"Jews, in general," he added, "only let you see what they want you to see."

In Brussels, heightened alert

Music rose from the center of Brussels on Sunday, with joggers and bicyclists moving freely down city streets as the seat of the European Union held its annual no-car day. It had the giddy air of a street fair, if less so for the city's Jewish organizations, which the police had placed under heightened security since two recent incidents.

The first happened the previous Sunday, Sept. 14, which marked the European Day of Jewish Culture. As people gathered to dedicate a plaque at a Holocaust memorial, youths hurled stones and bottles until the police arrived. Three days later, a fire erupted on an upper floor of a synagogue in the city's Anderlecht district; the authorities are investigating the incident as arson.

It was the May shooting at the Jewish Museum in Brussels — and the subsequent arrest of Mr. Nemmouche — that attracted international attention, as four people were killed, including two Israelis. But there have been smaller incidents that received less notice: a Turkish shop owner in Liège who posted a sign saying he would serve dogs but not Jews, a voice on the intercom of a commuter train that announced a stop as "Auschwitz" and ordered all Jews to get off.

"This summer, I started to see the world in a different way," said Marco Mosseri, 31, a native Italian who works in the automotive industry in Brussels. "I was scared. I spent several nights without sleep. For the first time, I was thinking that maybe I could die from my religion."

With its chocolate shops, Trappist beers and gray gloom, Brussels is the center of Europe's sprawling bureaucracy, a symbol of the loathed policies of austerity. But Brussels also embodies the demographics transforming much of urban Europe, with generations of Muslim immigrants and their descendants now representing roughly a quarter of the population.

The Jewish community is small, about 20,000 people, most of them assimilated, secular Jews like Mr. Mosseri, who usually do not draw attention to their heritage. (A [recent report](#) issued jointly by two European Jewish organizations found that [40 percent of European Jews hide](#) their Jewishness.) Now some secular Jews say they have stopped wearing a necklace with the Star of David, or allowing their children to wear T-shirts for a Jewish summer camp on public buses or trains.

And since the start of the conflict in Gaza this summer, many describe social media, especially Facebook, as a swamp of hatred.

"I have friends who are never political and they are posting things about Gaza every day," said Ms. Frommer, the employee of the nonprofit organization. "It seems like an obsession. Is your obsession because you want to save children, or because you have a problem with Jews?"

In a city so devoted to politics, the issue of Israel can seem unavoidable to some Jews, even those who strive to be apolitical or tend to be critical of Israeli policy. Ms. Frommer grew up in Brussels, but then left for college in Britain, followed by a long stint working in Cambodia. When she returned to Brussels four years ago, she was struck by how much more polarized life seemed. Her Jewish friends were sticking closer together as office chatter now sometimes bore a sharper edge.

This summer, one of her Belgian colleagues repeatedly mentioned the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "He would often try to bring up the subject when I tried not to," she said. "Then the subject would shift from Israel to Jews. Then it was, 'Were there really six million Jews killed in the Second World War?'"

Nor was the comment isolated. There have been signs that anti-Jewish sentiment transcended the immediate backlash against the Gaza war. In Hungary, the rise of the far-right Jobbik party has brought concerns that anti-Semitic views are gaining mainstream traction.

In Italy, extreme right-wing activists were blamed for a flurry of anti-Jewish graffiti, including Nazi swastikas, on buildings in various cities. In Rome, [f liers calling for a boycott](#) of at least 40 Jewish-owned stores appeared last month with the signature of the far-right group Vita Est Militia. Italian investigators were also looking into whether such far-right parties were building alliances with extremist left-wing groups.

In Brussels, several pro-Palestinian marches were held this summer, most of which were peaceful, but a few bore an anti-Semitic edge, including shouts of "Death to Jews!" While Belgian politicians quickly condemned the shooting at the Jewish Museum, some Jews felt the response to the protests, including that of the center-left Socialists, was tepid at best.

"The Socialist Party is afraid, because of the votes here in Belgium," said Dr. Maurice Sosnowski, an anesthesiologist and prominent Jewish leader in Brussels. "In Belgium, they are not willing to speak loudly, because there are a lot of Muslims."

In the nonprofit world of Brussels, the politics of Israel, which some on the European left view as essentially the pursuit of racist objectives against Palestinians, have made it difficult to keep the fight against anti-Semitism high on the agenda.

"Some see it in conflict with the anti-racism movement," said Robin Sclafani, director of the Brussels-based group [A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe](#). The organization, also known as CEJI, provides anti-discrimination training to teachers, social workers and others. Ms. Sclafani said she now receives numerous requests for training sessions to combat discrimination against Muslims, yet there is little interest in workshops on anti-Semitism.

"Nobody comes," she said, adding that she has started pairing the sessions together.

Michaël Privot, director of [the European Network Against Racism](#), said that blaming only the Islamic fringe for anti-Semitism discounted academic studies that show how deeply ingrained it remains among all Belgians — as well as other Europeans — and risked giving a free pass to right-wing extremist groups.

"You have, basically, a golden opportunity for the right fringe to blame it on Muslims and claim innocence," Mr. Privot said.

On Sunday, as much of the city enjoyed the car-free streets of Brussels, a group of secular Jews gathered at the headquarters of CEJI with a visiting journalist to discuss ordinary life for them. Because of the heightened security alert, three plainclothes police officers were stationed in the lobby.

Like others in the room, Ms. Frommer described a growing sense of isolation. As a teenager, she participated in left-wing Jewish youth groups, but she said some of her friends were now attracted to the extremist right-wing party [Vlaams Belang](#). The party is led by Filip Dewinter, an outspoken critic of Muslim immigration who has been courting Jews, despite his party's past links to anti-Semitism.

"I would never be able to vote for someone like that," Ms. Frommer said. "But some people are now. It is more and more legitimate to vote right wing."

She and others said that many friends were talking of moving to Canada or to the United States, if not Israel, even though they are uncertain whether their anxieties are fully justified.

"These are people with good jobs," she said. "And life is comfortable here. The big question is: Should we be paranoid or not?"

Anxiety in Germany

The news spread quickly in the early morning of July 29 among the Jews of Wuppertal, Germany. Someone had tried to firebomb the city's synagogue. The devices had failed to ignite, leaving the building with little damage, unlike the collective psyche of its members.

"For Jews in Germany, especially for us, this has very, very deep meaning," said Artour Gourari, a local businessman and synagogue member. "Synagogues are burning again in Germany in the night."

Nowhere in Europe has the postwar imperative to fight anti-Semitism been more complete — and more intertwined with national redemption — than in Germany. In Wuppertal, a manufacturing center, the city's synagogue was burned in 1938 during the two-day rampage known as Kristallnacht, when an anti-Jewish pogrom swept across Nazi Germany.

After the war ended, Wuppertal's Jewish community had no synagogue and, with only 60 members, seemed destined for extinction. But with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the German government opened the country to persecuted Soviet Jews, and soon refugees from Uzbekistan, Belarus, Ukraine and Russia had settled in Wuppertal. The local Jewish population reached 2,500. The presidents of Germany and Israel attended the 2002 inauguration of the new synagogue.

Now a police van is stationed around the clock in a small park across from the synagogue. The police have arrested three suspects in the firebombing attack, all Palestinians, including one from Gaza, as well as a 17-year-old refugee. The refugee has lived in Wuppertal for two years, among the different Muslim communities of Turks, North Africans and asylum seekers from Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

Until the synagogue attack, Wuppertal officials had taken pride in the peaceful coexistence of so many religions and ethnicities. Many of the older Muslims had arrived in the 1960s for work but assumed they would eventually return to their home countries. Now a third generation, born in Germany, is growing up with different expectations, as well as a sense of alienation.

"They have to justify why they don't fully belong to the society," said Samir Bouaissa, a local Muslim leader.

One of the local high schools is named after a famous Jewish poet, Else Lasker-Schüler, and is commonly called "The School Without Racism." Yet two recent graduates described rising tensions in the multiethnic student body, including resentment by some Muslim students over a sister-school arrangement with a school in Israel. This summer, during the Gaza crisis, several Muslim adolescents began circulating anti-Israel posts on social media.

This one "got shot yesterday," said a Facebook post from Gaza shared by a student. It showed a photograph of a female Israeli soldier and added an obscenity. The student added his own postscript: "You get what you deserve."

Antonia Lammertz, 19, a recent graduate, said only a small minority of students were extreme but that a softer bias was common even among the mainstream. "In my school, to be called a Jew was to be cursed, or insulted," she said, noting a problem that officials have tried to root out at many German schools.

City religious leaders reacted quickly after the synagogue attack. Imams and Christian ministers rushed to the building to pledge support. More than 300 people came to a hurriedly organized peace meeting the next day.

"People were shocked," Mr. Bouaissa said. "A threat against one of our religious houses is a threat against all of us."

Earlier this month, the city's religious leaders, including many Muslims, got another shock: a small group of men, one only 19, spent an evening walking through a Muslim neighborhood, lecturing young people about vices like gambling (while apparently not mentioning Jews). They were wearing orange jackets that read "Shariah Police." The leader was a Salafist, Sven Lau, who called the event a one-time publicity move to stir more "Islamic discussion."

That, it did. Local prosecutors filed charges. German officials, including Ms. Merkel, reacted with a blend of shock, indignation and alarm, while mainstream Muslims also protested. And local neo-Nazis responded with their own patrol, dressing in red pullovers and pledging to protect the public from Islamists.

For Leonid Goldberg, the community leader of the Wuppertal synagogue, the emergence of a radical Islamic fringe is less a surprise. Just four days before the synagogue attack, someone had spray-painted "Free Palestine" on the front wall of the building. In recent years, Mr. Goldberg has used a celebration of Rosh Hashana at the synagogue — an event attended by elected officials and religious leaders of the city, including Muslims — to warn about rising anti-Semitism among extremist Muslims in the city.

"No one wanted to hear that," he said.

Anti-Semitism and the future of Europe

CEJI (26.05.2014) - This weekend in the heart of Europe has been a stark and symbolic reminder of what is at stake for the future of social cohesion in this grand and visionary project of the European Union.

On the eve of European and Belgian elections, a gunman opened fire in the Jewish Museum of Brussels, killing 4 people. It is probably the worst incident of anti-semitic hate crime seen in Belgium since WWII.

The European Union was born in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust with the purpose of sustaining peaceful relations in a land which had been twice torn apart by war in the first half of the 20th century. There was a general shock in the self-realisation of how much anti-semitic complicity enabled Hitler to enact his genocidal mission against the Jewish people, with Roma, homosexuals, disabled people also victims in his crusade. Remorse was translated into a sense of political and public responsibility.

Yet this weekend's European Parliament elections saw 77 new MEPs from xenophobic parties, up 50% from five years ago. This does not bode well for the future of Europe.

The European Union is rooted in the value of respect for diversity. It seems that the foundation of Europe is currently undergoing some kind of earthquake, with this weekend's anti-semitic attacks providing the exclamation mark on the election results.

What is most despairing, however, is that it is not a total surprise in the EU capital given the many recent indicators of a hostile climate for Jews in Belgium. Just this month on May 4th, a gathering of 500 anti-semitic politicians and public figures (including the infamous French comedian Dieudonne) took place in Brussels, called the "First European Conference of Dissidence".

It is good to hear the Belgian politicians sharing their outrage at this Saturday's attack. CEJI's Director Robin Sclafani says, "I hope they can finally hear the alarm this time for what is a wake-up call that has been snoozed too many times already."

CEJI urges our Belgian and European political representatives to implement the following measures:

- Adequate European wide security measures for vulnerable Jewish institutions and buildings. This need is more pressing than ever and it is a responsibility of the state to keep its people safe.
- Comprehensive hate crime monitoring which is a crucial part of the process of understanding, preventing and responding to anti-semitism and other forms of bias motivated violence.
- Obligatory educational curriculum against anti-Semitism, racism and all forms of hatred which is absolutely essential to give room to the many cultures and religions in Europe.

About CEJI:

CEJI – *A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe* stands with individuals and organisations of all religions, cultures and backgrounds to promote a diverse and inclusive Europe. Through the programme, Facing Facts!, CEJI trains civil society organisations how to monitor hate crimes in order to advocate for effective prevention and intervention measures. CEJI works to combat prejudice and discrimination and to promote social cohesion through training and education, dialogue initiatives and advocacy at a European level. www.ceji.org
