

Anti-Islam voices grow louder in Germany, worrying leaders

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([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) When German Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned a rash of hate-mongering on the streets of Dresden Monday, it was the second time in just months that she's had to appeal to the public to act with tolerance.

While in both cases, protests against religious minorities have been led by fringe movements, they are testing a tradition of welcome that has been firmly in place in post-World War II Germany.

Merkel made her first plea this summer, after Israel's actions in Gaza led to tense protests across Europe, some marked by anti-Semitism. But the hateful tone shocked Germany the most.

"That people in Germany are threatened and abused because of their Jewish appearance or their support for Israel is an outrageous scandal that we won't accept," Merkel said at a peace march. "It's our national and civic duty to fight anti-Semitism."

Now she's had to turn her attention to those protesting the "Islamization" of Germany. Monday, the latest of the marches, which started in Dresden this fall, drew the largest crowd yet, more than 10,000 people. The new movement dubs itself "Patriotic Europeans Against Islamization of the West," or "Pegida."

"There is freedom of demonstration in Germany, but there is no place for spreading hatred and slander against people who come to us from other countries," Merkel said at a news conference Monday.

Germany has in recent years opened its doors to outsiders, who are keeping the economy humming steadily even though the country's birth rate is one of the lowest in Europe. And Germany has played one of the most visible roles in Europe in the Syrian refugee crisis, with officials estimating that year-end tallies for all foreigners granted asylum in Germany could exceed 200,000.

But that has made Germany vulnerable to the kind of widespread anti-immigrant sentiment that far-right parties in France or Britain have tapped into.

During the Gaza protests, Ronald S. Lauder, president of the World Jewish Congress, spoke of his surprise about Germany as the setting of anti-Semitism.

"There are some places where I'd expect to see this," he told Reuters, "but not in Germany."

More than 500,000 Jews called Germany home when the Nazis took over in 1933. There were only 30,000 by the end of the Holocaust. Since then the population has swelled again.

"That far more than 100,000 Jews are now living in Germany is something of a miracle," Merkel said this summer. "Jewish life is part of our identity and culture. It hurts me when I hear that young Jewish parents are asking if it's safe to raise their children here or elderly ask if it was right to stay here."

After Monday's Dresden march, German Justice Minister Heiko Maas called the "Pegida" movement a "disgrace" as he and leaders rushed to show it isn't the mainstream view.

"I have no sympathy for what's happening at the moment on German streets," he told Bloomberg News. "Under the banner of Pegida, people are on the streets living out their resentments and their xenophobia on the backs of refugees who've just lost everything. That's why I would wish that as many people as possible show in coming days that that isn't the majority."