

Anti-Semitic rhetoric and attacks increasing across Europe

**“Our country,” said French president Emmanuel Macron, “like Europe as a whole and almost all Western democracies, is facing a resurgence of anti-Semitism not seen since the Second World War.”**

by [Peter Ford](#) in the [March 27, 2019](#) issue

*(The Christian Science Monitor)* As dusk fell over Paris one February evening, 20,000 people gathered around the iconic statue of La République to demonstrate their disgust at anti-Semitism. France had witnessed a wave of anti-Semitic incidents in prior weeks, including the desecration of Jewish graves with swastikas.

“I can’t stand this racist filth,” said Florent Nicoud, a young filmmaker with a placard reading “That’s Enough,” as he showed support for Jewish neighbors. “I don’t know if this changes much, but at least we can say, ‘We’re here; you are not alone.’”

Hate crimes against Jewish targets are rising across the continent, with increases reported last year in almost every country in Europe. Anti-Semitic rhetoric is becoming more open as nationalist and populist movements have grown more powerful and as some Muslim citizens have reinforced centuries-old European prejudices in airing grievances against Israel’s policies.

“Our country, like Europe as a whole and almost all Western democracies, is facing a resurgence of anti-Semitism not seen since the Second World War,” French president Emmanuel Macron told the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions at their annual dinner in February.

In Britain, nine members of Parliament quit the Labour Party in February, citing anti-Semitism as one of their main reasons. Luciana Berger, a Jewish MP who needed a police escort when she attended the last Labour Party annual conference after receiving death threats, said the party was “institutionally anti-Semitic.”

Political leaders on the Far Right routinely denigrate Jews and downplay their suffering. Alexander Gauland, coleader of the Alternative for Germany party, recently described Adolf Hitler and the Nazi era as a “speck of bird droppings in over 1,000 years of successful German history.”

A senator for the Five Star Movement, a partner in Italy’s ruling coalition, was put under investigation earlier this month for promoting claims there is a Jewish plot to take over the world, citing the notorious forgery titled *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

The Swiss GRA Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism has noted increasing numbers of hate messages on the Internet, writing in its most recent report, “Inhibitions are slowly disappearing and more and more agitators are acting openly under their real names.”

Historically, spikes in anti-Semitic behavior in Europe have coincided with spikes in violence in the Israel-Palestine conflict, said Marc Knobel, research director at France’s Representative Council of Jewish Institutions.

“Paroxysms of violence are imported from the Middle East to Europe, and Jews are made responsible for actions by the state of Israel,” he said.

Anger at Israel constitutes a major strand in what has become known as “the new anti-Semitism” emanating from some Muslim groups in Europe.

“But the prejudices young Muslims express are no different from the ones you hear from the extreme right,” said Jean-Yves Camus, a specialist in anti-Semitism at the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs. “Anti-Semitism has been a constant feature of European history for two millennia.”

He would like to see sterner action by the police and courts.

“If you knew that being an active anti-Semite could land you in jail, you’d think twice before insulting your Jewish neighbor,” he said.

Sigmound Königsberg, the Berlin Jewish community’s anti-Semitism commissioner, also thinks that “anti-Semitism has to be banned and made unacceptable.”

Anti-Semitic prejudice continues to surface in political platforms promoting hostility to immigrants and other outsiders.

“Beyond being a threat to Jews, anti-Semitism is a warning signal of a weakening of democracy in our country,” argued Francis Kalifat, president of France’s Representative Council of Jewish Institutions, in a recent statement.

His colleague Knobel sees France as “threatened by totalitarians who hate democracy and want to bring it down.”

When speaking to the council, Macron promised legislation to ensure that messages on the Internet promoting anti-Semitism are taken down faster, make it easier to identify those who post such messages anonymously, and make platforms such as Facebook legally liable for content posted.

Marie van der Zyl, president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, said she valued the support shown in actions such as demonstrations.

“There is good in humanity,” she said. “I don’t want to lose sight of that.”

**FOLLOWING UP (Updated June 19, 2019):** The UK’s Labour Party is being investigated for mistreatment of Jewish people by the UK’s official body monitoring unlawful discrimination. The Equality and Human Rights Commission launched a formal inquiry into whether party members have “harassed or victimized people because they are Jewish” and whether senior officials have responded adequately to anti-Semitism, Religion News Service reported.

In the past year the Labour Party has suspended 96 members and expelled 12 amid charges of anti-Semitism. Yet many people noted that Labour recently expelled one member days after he admitted voting Liberal Democrat in European Union elections, yet took three years to expel a member who claimed Jewish people controlled the slave trade and benefited from the Holocaust.

Additionally, the Muslim Council of Britain made a complaint to the Equality and Human Rights Commission that the Conservative Party, which is currently in power in Parliament, has tolerated hostile comments about Muslims by its party members. Former party chair Sayeeda Warsi, who is Muslim, has also criticized her party for Islamophobia.

*A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title “Anti-Semitism on the rise in European countries.”*