

European Coalition Defends Israel in the Face of Blatant Racism

In the aftermath of the 75th anniversary of the night of broken glass, Kristallnacht, a more recent anniversary was marked in the European parliament in Brussels on Nov. 13 when the Christian initiative European Coalition for Israel (ECI) celebrated its 10th anniversary in the EU capital.

The connection between the two anniversaries are clear, says founding director Tomas Sandell. In 1938, there was no coordinated effort from grass-roots Christians in Europe to raise awareness of the evil at the time. One generation later, we have to make sure we do not repeat the same mistakes again.

ECI is bringing together Christian leaders and grass-roots activists to support Israel and raise awareness of new forms of anti-Semitism—in particular, the boycott, divest and sanction movement (BDS) with its many similarities to the **anti-Jewish** campaigns of the 1930s.

As a new generation of Europeans, we have to be on our guard each time the Jews and their businesses are singled out, as is the case for the BDS movement, which calls for boycotts and sanctions of Israeli businesses, culture and academia.

Then, the slogan was *“Kauf nicht beim Juden”* (Don’t buy from Jews). Now it is simply “Boycot Israel.”

History has taught us the church is not immune against the cancer of **anti-Semitism**. At a time when Israel is facing many enemies, it is our duty as Christians to keep an eye on our own camp, not just blame the problems on others.

The anniversary comes just a few days after the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights in Vienna released new statistics that confirms anti-Semitism is a growing problem in Europe. According to the survey, 66 percent of the **Jews** regard anti-Semitism to be a major problem and 76 percent said the situation has become more acute over the last five years.

Even in the seats of the European parliament, there are today well-known neo-Nazis and **Holocaust** deniers though the current chairman Martin Schulz has made Holocaust denial illegal in the chambers of the European parliament, a historical initiative which has been applauded by ECI.

In 2005, ECI initiated its own Holocaust memorial in the European parliament in Brussels, which has now become an official event, thanks to the support of the EU president.

Still, the realities of the commemoration events are not always reflected in day-to-day politics. In a recent article in the *Times of Israel* on Nov. 8, Sandell pointed out the proposed EU guidelines for the disputed territories risk bringing Europe back on a slippery slope toward anti-Semitism, where Jewish settlers will be considered international outlaws. The new guidelines forbid EU grants, prizes and loans from going not only to Israeli entities located beyond the Green Line, but also to Israeli entities that have any activities beyond the post-1967 lines.

What historically started with boycotts never ended there, warns Sandell.

The guidelines are a major victory for the BDS movement, which have lobbied the EU aggressively for many years. When the call to mark Israeli goods from the territories were presented in Brussels earlier this year, many well-known Christian charities and denominations were at the forefront.

The sentiments were similar 10 years ago, when the coalition was officially formed in Brussels. In an EU emergency meeting

in Brussels, Nobel prize-winner Elie Wiesel asked the audience why no one is protesting when the Jewish communities are being targeted in Europe, except the **Jews** themselves? Where are all the others? he asked.

A few months later, ECI was formed as “a coalition of all the others,” indicating it is neither Israeli nor Jewish but consists of concerned Europeans who want to remain diligent at a time when Israel is facing an existential threat from Iran and is being targeted in a unprecedented diplomatic war of boycotts and sanctions.

It is an irony of history that the vision of ECI was born at the same time as the modern BDS movement was launched in Durban, South Africa, in conjunction with the U.N. conference against racism in September 2001. The late U.S. congressman and **Holocaust** survivor Tom Lantos called the conference “his worst experience of anti-Semitism since the Holocaust.”

Ten years later, both movements—the BDS movement and ECI—have matured.

Time will tell which movement will come out stronger. But more important than power and influence is simply the duty to do the right thing and to one day be found on the right side of history. History will judge us hard if we fail the Jewish people again, concludes Sandell.