

# House Considers Rising Anti-Semitism in Europe, Middle East

An advertisement in Athens intertwines a swastika with a Jewish star. Hungarian politicians declare Jews a national security risk. A gunman executes three children and a rabbi at a Jewish school in France.

Such recent instances of anti-Semitism reflect a growing wave of hatred toward Jews across Europe, one documented by civil rights groups and concerning to those who fear that, nearly 70 years after the Holocaust, it has again become socially acceptable to vilify Jews.

Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., convened a hearing on Wednesday (Feb. 27) on this rise in anti-Semitism, calling it a threat not only to Jews, but to other religious minorities and the ideal of tolerance in general.

“Unparalleled since the dark ages of the Second World War, Jewish communities on a global scale are facing verbal harassment, and sometimes violent attacks against synagogues, Jewish cultural sites, cemeteries and individuals,” said Smith, chairman of a House panel on global human rights, part of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

About one-third of Europeans hold anti-Semitic beliefs, according to a 2012 survey of 10 countries by the Anti-Defamation League, with many showing higher levels of disdain for Jews than in the ADL’s 2009 survey. The ADL asked questions such as “Do you believe Jews hold too much power over the world’s international financial markets?” In France, for example, nearly one-third of those surveyed (29 percent) agreed.

To a nearly packed hearing room, a first panel of witnesses—none of whom represent Jewish organizations—urged U.S. political leaders to call out anti-Semitism when they see it, and to support those who speak up for Jews, often at great risk.

On a recent visit to Egypt, Katrina Lantos Swett, chairwoman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, said she confronted government leaders about the comments of President Mohamed Morsi, who had in 2010 urged Egyptians to “nurse our children and grandchildren on hatred for Jews and Zionists.”

“When confronted on these comments, Egyptian officials with whom we met attempted to divert the discussion to attacks on the state of Israel,” said Lantos Swett, whose father, the late Rep. Tom Lantos, D-Calif., was the first Holocaust survivor elected to Congress and chaired the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Several other witnesses also noted that anti-Semitism often masquerades as political criticism of Israel.

“Jews as a people are often vilified in the context of attacks on Israel,” said Elisa Massimino, president and CEO of the nonprofit Human Rights First, an international civil rights group based in Washington and New York. “While criticism of Israeli government policies—or those of any other government—is legitimate discourse, it crosses the line when it disparages or demonizes Jews as a people.”

Several speakers said the demonization of Jews is both homegrown and imported. Hostility toward Jews comes from both far-left and far-right political parties, as well as radicalized immigrants from the Middle East who grow up on Arab and Muslim media infused with negative Jewish stereotypes.

But governments have been generally slow to react to the

growing threat to Jewish communities in Europe, said Rabbi Andrew Baker, the American Jewish Committee's director of international Jewish affairs.

"Some governments willfully do not want to know," said Baker, part of a second panel of Jewish leaders from the U.S. and Europe. "And they have limited their monitoring tools so they will not be confronted with the facts."

Europe was home to 9.5 million Jews before the Holocaust, which represented more than 60 percent of the world's Jewish population (and 1.7 percent of Europe's population), according to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Today, the vast majority of the world's 13.4 million Jews live in North America or Israel, and 1.5 million live in Europe (0.2 percent of Europe's population).

The situation seems most dire in France, which is home to Europe's largest Jewish community: about 485,000 people. The 2012 ADL study showed that nearly a quarter of French people surveyed (24 percent) subscribed to anti-Semitic beliefs, up from 20 percent in the 2009 survey.

Rabbi David Meyer, born and raised in Paris and now a professor at Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, noted that after a Muslim radical shot three children and a rabbi to death at a Jewish school in Toulouse last March, France saw sympathy toward the victims but also an uptick in harassment of and violence against Jews.

"Even after 2,000 years of attested Jewish life in Europe, we are still perceived as a foreign tribe, landed on the European continent," Meyer lamented. "A tolerated minority whose religious practices are below the standard of what Europe likes to project about itself."

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