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Statement in the German Federal Parliament on Jew Hatred (Antisemitism) by Thomas Paul Schirmmacher

(Bonn, 29.05.2024) The Human Rights Council of the Deutsche Bundestag, the German Federal Parliament, held an expert hearing April 24, 2024, to discuss the Third Federal Report on Religious Freedom. One question asked to the President of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), Archbishop Prof. Dr. Thomas Paul Schirmmacher, was about antisemitism. Here is an excerpt from his answer, translated from German.

Anti-Semitism

What do you see as the main causes of the rampant anti-Semitism worldwide, and what measures should the German government and other democratic states take to counteract this decisively and sustainably? (Alliance 90/The Greens)

It should be noted at the outset that “Jew hatred,” a term that the German government’s National Strategy against Anti-Semitism and for Jewish Life (NASAS) of 2022 uses in parallel with “antisemitism,” is actually a more precise term for the problem under discussion.

I recently gave a guest lecture at Princeton University on the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Afterwards, I went to the university’s Center for Jewish Life to find out about attacks on Jewish students, who make up 9.6 % of the university’s student body. I was struck by the fact that many of the students concerned were themselves harshly critical of the Israeli government. However, they were not attacked because of their political beliefs—which



Thomas Paul Schirmmacher at the “Wall of Death” of the Memorial Auschwitz I in Poland on March 18, 2024 © IIRF/Schirmmacher

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would be bad enough—but simply as Jews, by perpetrators whose beliefs they largely shared.

In my book 'Racism', I argue that three types of racism have been passed down from generation to generation for centuries and are manifested worldwide. These are the defamation and suppression of oppression of:

1. “Blacks” or “coloureds” (i.e. people with a darker skin colour than oneself)—they are supposedly stupid and uncivilised;
2. Jews—they are supposedly devious, greedy and domineering; and
3. “Gypsies,” i.e. mainly the Roma people—they are supposedly antisocial and thieving.

The reasons why, out of the many forms of racism and hatred toward others and the thousands of ethnic groups worldwide, it is precisely the Jews and Roma who have been targeted globally is being discussed worldwide, but this question is unlikely to be answered in a reasonable way. It is difficult to understand why millions of people in Indonesia are currently turning publicly against Jews and Israel, even though they do not care about the persecution of the Uyghurs by China, the burning of Muslim soldiers by the Russian government, or the situation of refugees worldwide.

In the case of Judaism, the two largest world religions, as daughters of Judaism, together with modern secularism, as grandchild so to speak, have a common tragic history of antisemitism, and have fueled each other. This is not the place to trace the antisemitic history of Islam and Christianity, which has always gone hand in hand with conspiracy theories. There is also no question that European antisemitism fueled Islamic antisemitism in the colonial era, as the Jews were long seen by Islam as a small, insignificant group in need of protection that was inferior anyway, whereas now, thanks to conspiracy theories, the Jews have become perceived as a world threat. This is partly due to the search for an explanation for the fact that the Arab countries could not defeat the Jewish state militarily.

However, this antisemitism coming from Europe was already a secular antisemitism. Secularizing Europe produced antisemitism not only in the form of National Socialism, which saw the Jews not as followers of a religion, but as an ethnic group (“race”). The “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” in particular, written in Russian in 1903 but not widely distributed in German and English until 1919, provided an “upgrade” of hatred with its world conspiracy theory for the Christian world and, by the Second World War at the latest, for the Arab and Islamic world. The result was an ominous mix.

A typical example is anti-Zionism directed against Israel as a variant of antisemitism directed against Jews. Anti-Zionism wants the Jews not to have a Jewish state in Palestine, even if a solution is found for the Palestinians. But what is it that is actually hated? Is it about Judaism as a religion as opposed to Islam, for example? Is it about Israel's liberal political system? Is it about the Jews as a race? The answer to this last question is obvious, or otherwise the Arabic edition of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* would not be a hit. Incidentally, the Arabic edition renders “antisemitism” as “anti-Judaism,” because

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the Nazis of course did not mean to refer to the Arabs, who are also Semites and did not understand Judaism as a religion but as a community of descent, which is why Jews baptized as Christians were also murdered indiscriminately.

The same conflation is of course reversed in the attitude of many extremist Israelis toward the Palestinians, where it is also unclear whether Palestinians are hated as a “race” or because of their religion (as Muslims and to a lesser extent as Christians).

Germany has two excellent action catalogues and strategy papers, which are located in the Federal Ministry of the Interior and which only need to be implemented more strongly, and which I could comment on but could hardly add to in a meaningful way.

1. The report ‘Antisemitism in Germany: Report of the Independent Expert Group on Antisemitism—Manifestations, Conditions, Prevention Approaches’ contains an excellent stocktaking along with central and realizable recommendations for action.
2. The ‘National Strategy against Anti-Semitism and for Jewish Life’, adopted by the Federal Government in 2022, (which actually says everything that needs to be said—it just needs to be implemented), is even more specific.



Thomas Paul Schirmacher on March 18, 2023 at the international memorial at the Memorial Auschwitz II-Birkenau in Poland on March 18. 2024 © IIRF/Schirmacher

This strategy was developed in cooperation with the Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Anti-Semitism, who was appointed in 2018 and who, in my experience, does an excellent job, especially in joint appearances at home and abroad. It would be desirable to provide his office with better financial resources—also in comparison to more recent Federal Government commissioners, especially since it has become clear since the terrorist attack of October 7, 2023 that Germany must address the issue of antisemitism not only because of historical responsibility but also because of a multitude of malicious motives, some of which have nothing to do with our own history. Antisemitism—just like other forms of racism—is always wrong, regardless of the historical background of the motives and the religious or other socialization of the perpetrators.

It should also be noted that Germany—this time represented by the Federal Foreign Ministry—held the presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

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(IHRA) in 2020–2021. Germany has been a member of the IHRA since 1998 and adopted the IHRA's (legally non-binding) working definition of antisemitism in 2017.

And finally, Germany supports the EU Commission's 2023 declaration on antisemitic incidents in Europe and has agreed to the EU Commission's excellent 2021 catalogue of measures, the 'EU Strategy against Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life', a voluntary commitment by all member states. These texts and strategies were largely developed by the EU Commission's Office of the Coordinator on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life, headed by Katharina von Schnurbein from Germany since 2015.

I could go on by referring to the 2020 'Anti-Semitism Situation Report' from the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and many other official government statements, so the problem is less due to the absence of proposed measures and strategies than due to the lack of implementation or funding.

Downloads and Links:

- **Photo 1:** Thomas Paul Schirmmacher at the "Wall of Death" of the Memorial Auschwitz I in Poland on March 18, 2024 © IIRF/Schirmmacher
- **Photo 2:** Thomas Paul Schirmmacher on March 18, 2023 at the international memorial at the Memorial Auschwitz II-Birkenau in Poland on March 18, 2024 © IIRF/Schirmmacher
- National Strategy against Anti-Semitism and for Jewish Life (NASAS): <https://www.antisemitismusbeauftragter.de/SharedDocs/downloads/Webs/BAS/DE/nasas.html>
- Antisemitism in Germany: Report of the Independent Expert Group on Antisemitism—Manifestations, Conditions, Prevention Approaches: <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/themen/heimat-integration/expertenkreis-antisemitismus/antisemitismus-in-deutschland-bericht.html>
- National strategy of the Federal Government against anti-Semitism and for Jewish Life: <https://www.bmi.bund.de/DE/themen/heimat-integration/wehrhafte-demokratie/nationale-strategie-gegen-antisemitismus/nationale-strategie-gegen-antisemitismus-node.html>
- EU Strategy against Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47065/st13637-en20.pdf>
- Update of the anti-Semitism situation report (2024): <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/allgemein/2024-05-lagebild-antisemitismus.html>

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