

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to have been asked to address your prestigious conference, after this morning's remarkable speeches of this morning. I am also somewhat daunted, as I am not an expert in community building and I am unable to show you statistics on French Jewish community comparable to those that were presented for United Kingdom: questions about religious affiliations are strictly forbidden in our country.

I think however that it is impossible to entirely separate internal social issues and their overall society environment, with its political factors.

You have asked me to address this sensitive topic from a "European" viewpoint. Obviously, it is impossible to study the situation of a specific country in Europe without insisting on the very close connection with other countries in Europe, not forgetting that the Jews have, at least since the Middle Ages, been an example as well as a vector of this connection.

Indeed, just recently we had an example of this interconnection when the quenelle gesture of a French footballer, in support of a friend of his who is a French anti-Semitic humourist, was made on an English soccer field and punished by an English jurisdiction.

This connection can be seen in the threats being levelled at the shehita and at circumcision, beginning with the absurd case in Germany and continuing with the just as absurd statements made by the Council of Europe. We must explain to all our interlocutors that there will no longer be any Jews left in Europe if ritual slaughtering and circumcision are banned. That will be an opportunity to see who will be expressing their joy at such an outlook...

The most tragic example of this European interconnection was the Shoah - like most French people, I do not like the term "Holocaust" with its religious connotations. Among the European warring countries at the time, the only one to be directly spared from the Shoah was yours and I feel it is my duty to here pay tribute to Winston Churchill who carried on his shoulders the honour of humankind and without whom neither you nor I would have been able to participate in such a conference as this. There would simply not have been any Jews left in Europe.

During the First World War, which so traumatised the first part of the 20th century for the sheer number of its victims, England lost about 1 million men and France 1.7 million. During the Second World War, six million victims were lost just for the small Jewish people. On our side of Europe, we live surrounded by the dead and by the voids left by the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who were never born because men decided that they did not deserve to live. And let us remember that the Nazis almost won the war, that saving Jews was not a priority for the Allies, that some of their leaders would have been content with coming to an arrangement with the murderers for the sake of a so-called peace "with honour", that is to say, at the price of forgetting. Let us remember that it took dozens of years for the gas chambers to be considered more than a mere "detail of the war" (and that many - I insist, many - individuals today consider that questioning the Shoah is the "litmus test" of the freedom of speech and the sign of an independent mind that refuses to be indoctrinated by propaganda...

In 1900, ninety per cent of the world's Jewish population was European; today, in Europe in its widest sense, they number little more than ten per cent. In 1940, there were around 10 million Jews in Europe; today they number less than 1.5 million. In a Europe whose weight in the world has declined, the relative weight of Jews has also weakened; but of course, the dead don't vote...

We must not be the mere wardens of cemeteries without tombs and the bearers of a tragic memory that most certainly is not just "our" problem. But I believe that all Jews, whether they respect all 613 mitzvot or not, have, as Emil Fackenheim said, a duty to respect the 614th: do not give Hitler a posthumous victory. And for that, we must firmly and proudly carry the torch of the living Jewish people.

For my part, this has been the meaning of my life. After chairing the French Committee for Yad Vashem and working on the issue of memory and history, it was my privilege for six years to preside over the affairs of CRIF, the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France, which is the political voice of France's Jewish community, which today is the third largest in the world. Our many enemies, and even some of our misguided admirers, claim that CRIF gives its orders to the French government. Inasmuch as I am today free to express myself, please

allow me to let you into a secret: such a claim is FALSE. *Allevai*, as the Yiddish saying goes...

CRIF's articles of association stipulate that its purpose is to fight anti-Semitism, promote remembrance and defend the State of Israel. This is one of the reasons why, after having served my two terms, I accepted to chair Keren Hayessod France, the French branch of a national Israeli organisation that is entirely dedicated to strengthening the links between the Jewish people and Israel. For I might as well say so outright: I believe that solidarity with Israel must be core to the affirmation of our identity and our fight against anti-Semitism.

Today, much more acutely than when I left my position as President of CRIF ten months ago, the question of our lasting presence in France is raised. Today in the Jewish community there is hardly a conversation when the subject of leaving is not brought up. The Jewish agency and the Israeli authorities consider that in the coming years forty thousand Jews will leave France for Israel.

For sure, we know that the French Jewish community has always felt very close to Israel, that they often take their holidays there and often have family ties there. But all that was already the case before the recent developments. So what has happened in the past year?

An increase in the number of anti-Semitic aggressions? Not really. They are still at a high level but lower than in 2012, when we had the atrocious attacks in Toulouse, where an Islamic terrorist gunned down a little seven-year old girl and a father and his two sons in a Jewish school, and also three French soldiers. However, the other terrifying message that came out of 2012 was that the horror of violence, far from healing violence, engenders imitational violence: in the six weeks that followed those murders, the number of anti-Semitic acts multiplied by almost ten, compared to previous years.

Even though 2013 saw a smaller number of anti-Semitic acts, in France where Jews account for less than 1% of the population, they are the victims of 40 per cent of the racist acts reported to the police.

And what of the Dieudonné phenomenon? No, the increase in the number of departures preceded the media hype around the "quenelle". Dieudonné has been spewing out his hatred for years, and if those who claim to be his friends while swearing that they aren't anti-Semitic are

saying the truth, they must have pathologically split personalities. Dieudonné, who has declared that Mohamed Merah, the Toulouse murderer, was probably a Mossad agent, is the symptom of the intellectual and moral confusion of a general public that does not want to distinguish between freedom of speech and freedom to express one's hatred of Jews. The seventy per cent of the French population who criticized the Minister of Home Affairs for what they saw as being too heavy-handed with Dieudonné, are for us as much a cause of concern for the future as the language of the humourist himself.

And what of the economic crisis? It most certainly plays a major role. For many years, the French have been hearing that France was coping better than other European countries. Then all of a sudden another picture has begun to emerge, that of a country which has preferred to encourage unemployment over competitiveness and which fears to undertake the deep structural transformation it needs. All this has fed a pessimism that is particularly strong among young people, among whom a significant proportion is now considering moving abroad. London has become a destination of choice. And young Jews who know and love Israel are now beginning to envisage relocating and building their life there.

And for the generation preceding them, the heavier taxation measures to compensate for the crisis have been an incentive for many French residents to leave the country. Among other destinations, Israel has seen the arrival of a class of immigrants that it would never have imagined welcoming until now.

I do not accept general statements implying that France is an anti-Semitic country. To qualify a country as anti-Semitic requires that its government is at least complacent toward anti-Semitism and that a majority of the population is pushing for measures against Jews. I have never felt any anti-Semitism on the part of the politicians I have known. As for the general population, it had unreservedly accepted in 2011 that the second round of the presidential election would oppose Nicolas Sarkozy, who is often considered to be a Jew, and Dominique Strauss Kahn, who is undisputedly a Jew. Economic crises encourage the search for a scapegoat, but despite Madoff, Lehmann Brothers and Goldman Sachs, the current crisis hasn't triggered significant anti-Semitic reactions. That is why I consider that to compare the present situation

with what happened in the 1930s is absurd. But this does not mean that I am minimising the worries about the future, and I shall come back to this in a moment.

Judaism reflects about what is universal starting from the individual. That is why I beg to be allowed to begin by reflecting on my personal experience as an individual and the gradual awareness of the different components of my Jewish identity.

The individual I know best is myself. Which is why, rather than going through a catalogue of the European situation country by country, I prefer to use my personal experience as a guiding thread to be compared with the experience of others.

We all build up our world from what we choose to give meaning to in our formative years. Such comparisons of viewpoints enrich our understanding of reality and its complexity. I do not believe that the situation of Jews in Europe should be summed up in the observations that I sometimes hear: there is anti-Semitism, there always has been anti-Semitism and what's more there will always be anti-Semitism. Such language is too simplistic and does not allow any scope for action. What's more, it is the language that anti-Semitic polemicists maliciously resort to when they say "Isn't it strange that, wherever they go, Jews incite anti-Semitism. There must surely be something to it..."

I trust that you will bear with my egocentric approach as a means of questioning the diversity of the French and European situation: a small number of Jews but a lot of countries, different legacies and not a few enemies...

I am an Ashkenazi Jew, in a French community where three quarters of the members are of North African origin, whose families grew up in Muslim countries, speaking Arabic. The majority of them came to France in the 1960s in emergency circumstances. This was the case of Algerian Jews when the country gained its independence and today there are no Jews left in Algeria. There are a couple of thousand in Tunisia and some three to five thousand in Morocco, which was once the largest Jewish community in the Muslim world. And most of these have kept nostalgic memories of their country of origin.

The Jews from North Africa brought with them a renewal of religious

practice to a French Jewish world that was marked by the Shoah and which for a variety of reasons had withdrawn from its synagogues. The very word “community” was unknown, because when the Jews were granted their emancipation - in 1791, the first in history, if I may be allowed to be so jingoistic! - the process was accompanied by the famous phrase: “all as individuals and nothing as a nation...”.

Consequently, the Jewish community in France is very diverse. Only the German Jewish community probably experienced a similar major transformation in the last generation, with the arrival of the Jews from the Soviet Union. Some oppose “Jewish men of the street” of modest means but strongly affirming their Judaism to a “community establishment” that is suspected of not sufficiently defending the Jews and Israel.

The President of CRIF must not yield to populism but must nevertheless preserve the trust of the “Jewish man of the street”. It is not in the elegant suburbs where I live that Jews need fear; the majority of anti-Semitic violence takes place is in the often poorly built council housing estates around Paris where there were no Jews fifty years ago and where almost 200,000 live today.

When these Jews from North Africa arrived in France, those who did not have a lot of means or a family were sent to these estates. A few years later, those same estates took in the Muslim labourers from North Africa that French industry was looking for and they were later authorised to bring their families.

This situation is unique in Europe: a significant Jewish population living alongside an even more numerous Muslim population which has been the first victim of de-industrialisation, with its accompanying masses of long term unemployed and a closed future for its youth. The relations that fifty years ago were often cordial, have deteriorated over succeeding generations.

Many young Muslims who are now French citizens have been building up huge resentment toward France and jealousy of the Jews who have managed better than them to break out of the spiral of unemployment. This has been accompanied by an educational disaster that a few years ago was described by this shocking headline: “The lost territories of the Republic”. Everything that France had been so proud of, the integration of its population groups in the republican secular mould through the school system, was now failing.

But no one was speaking of that when the violence broke out against Jews during the El Aqsa intifada: 80 anti-Jewish acts in 1999, 750 in the last four months of 2000. It was very difficult to get the authorities to acknowledge that systematic attacks against synagogues must surely mean there was some anti-Semitism and not just “anti-Zionism”, or ordinary people rebelling against oppression... Eventually a new term was coined: “new anti-Semitism” came to describe these actions against Jews carried out by people who themselves had been the victims of discrimination. The term is no longer so new.

The violence and insults levelled at Jews have become commonplace and partially disconnected from the situation in Israel. Almost all of it originates from young Muslims, almost all of whom come from neighbourhoods with a strong joint presence. Public transport is frequently where this takes place and “visible” Jews (wearers of the kippa or Magen David...) are the first victims. For the last thirty years - since the Copernic synagogue bombing - we have had a remarkable protection service for the Jewish community, which works closely and in an atmosphere of trust with the police and which publishes reliable statistics. We have to be intransigent when it comes to investing in security, because it was a security weakness that led to the terrible attack against the Jewish school in Toulouse.

Over time, the physical contact between the two communities lessened; when they could afford it, Jews left the neighbourhoods and towns where they felt threatened, others moved their children to private schools, and still others left for Israel.

But the violence has also changed its face: fifteen years ago, Islamisation depended on a charismatic imam or a militant mosque. Today, a determined “lone wolf” can set up a network exclusively via Internet and a few addresses. They are much more difficult to monitor. There are great Sufi traditions in North Africa and Senegal and these movements used to be powerful fifteen years ago, but no longer as much. What *has* sadly developed is the movement of radical Islam. Today there are 700 French jihadists identified in Syria, where they have received serious military training, and the thought of their return to France is a cause of great anxiety. This is what one of them said recently in an interview: “My kid brother is a soldier, but I’ve said to him: if you go to war to kill Muslims and you come back, I’ll slit your throat in public.”

Many of these fanatics are converts. Prisons have become a reservoir of Islamisation. Jihadist Islam makes it possible to reverse the hierarchy

that reigns in disenfranchised neighbourhoods, to give vent to the violence of old rancour and to experience the euphoria of the sense of might that comes with feeling that one has been elected by God with the duty to kill all miscreants.

It is easy to instil fanaticism, it is much more difficult to remove it. That is an area of education and behavioural psychology which has been completely neglected, even though we live in a world that is dominated by advertising, and where advertising is dominated by behavioural psychology.

Over the years, I managed to build up some very close relations with numerous Muslim organisations and leading figures. Their rejection of radical Islam suffers no doubt, but their ability to speak out with a strong and influential voice is much more debatable. The boldest among them run serious physical risks and are considered to be traitors. I want to pay tribute to them, but they are few and far between.

I have lost many of my illusions. Radical Islam has declared war on our society and Jews are mere emblems of that society. This war is not going to be won through Judeo-Muslim friendship symposia that bring together the usual practitioners of dialogue, but have no influence worth mentioning on the ground, however highly we hold them in our esteem. In this war, money plays an important role. Direct and indirect financial circuits need to be exposed; we all know that Dieudonné's anti-Zionist party was financed by Iran, even though the Shiite community is tiny in France, yet the judicial system did not get involved...

I have insisted on radical Islam as a global danger and indeed I don't believe there is a single person in this room this evening who imagines that it will disappear once a solution has been found for the Israel-Palestine problem.

But all the young people who in the Paris metro insult a Jew or throw his kippa on the floor for fun are not necessarily candidates for jihad. In a way, this is all the more serious, because there are ever so many young people like that who have learned to hate Jews. The Jewish community in France, which is ten times smaller than the Muslim community, is asking how it can live in a country where such hatred weighs down on national electoral choices.

We all say that we must teach young children about other religions and the need for tolerance. I am somewhat sceptical about that, the worrying trend today being not to speak of the need to fight anti-Semitism but to

give the preference to fighting racism and to place Islamophobia - which is an attack against Islam and not against Muslims themselves - on the same level as anti-Semitism. That is an unacceptable assimilation: in France, 40 per cent of racist acts target Jews, who represent less than 1 per cent of the population. Freedom of speech means to respect the members of a religion and not necessarily the tenets of that religion.

Demographic factors specifically characterise the situation in France. In a Europe where several countries have a sizeable Muslim population, we must not forget the deplorable example of Malmoe in Sweden, whose former mayor said that the Jewish community in his city was too small for him to be interested in its security.

Among the Ashkenazims, I am from the minority that came from Eastern Europe and not Eastern France, where the Jews from Alsace, the region bordering the Black Forest in Germany, have been a remarkable example of French patriotism since their emancipation in 1791.

Jews whose families were living in France before the war were tricked by the Vichy government which was an accomplice of the Nazis. They were arrested by French police and transported to Auschwitz in French trains. Modern day France has indeed done some remarkable soul searching over this period, but it came late and this work on its memories was only completed in 1995, when President Chirac publicly acknowledged France's responsibility in the crimes of the Shoah.

Up until then, the official message, that of General De Gaulle and his successors, was that the whole of the French population had been resisting, that legal France was in London and that Vichy was merely following German orders. And in order to magnify the Resistance it did not do to insist too much on the Jews.

This message was mistaken, but when they began to put more emphasis on the Shoah, many resistance fighters felt neglected and hurt; Petain's admirers were only too happy to associate themselves with them. Jean Marie Le Pen referred publicly to the Shoah as a detail of the history of the Second World War. Others were thinking it.

The idea that "the Jews are playing up the Shoah a bit too much" is today reactivating ancient anti-Semitic prejudices, specially when this idea is associated with a critical comment about the way Israelis treat Palestinians.

We have even heard worse things: last January, in Paris, we heard

slogans saying “Jew go away, France doesn’t belong to you...”. It was the first time since World War 2 that such words had been heard during a public demonstration. No one can tell if it will be the last.

Marine Le Pen, the current leader of the National Front, is careful to avoid any excess of language, just like the president of the FPÖ in Austria. But the past history of both parties is clear: anti-Semitism is written into their DNA.

And that is not to mention Jobbik in Hungary, Svoboda in Ukraine and Golden Dawn in Greece, parties that are thriving on the hatred of Jews, of Romanis and foreigners in general and on the glorification of Nazism. Despite the principle of universal suffrage, such parties have no place in democracies.

However, there is also the terrible, misleading confusion that it is the Palestinians who are being subjected to the real Shoah. Behind this lie, we find the usual mix of fools, fanatics and perverts. We can try to do something with the fools, but we can’t fight the others.

Dieudonné, accompanied by the laughter of his audiences, once made a false deportee give a prize to Robert Faurisson, the best known French negationist. In addition to his connection with Jean Marie Le Pen on the extreme right, and his support from the extreme left because he denounces capitalists, and his friendship with Blacks because he denounces slavery, and his support among Muslims because he denounces Zionism, he also benefits from the admiration of all those who are angry because he invokes the right to freedom of speech, and he uses these various alliances to express his hatred of the Jews while mocking the Shoah.

The memory of the Shoah is often today thrown back into the face of Jews and feeds the very anti-Semitism it is supposed to fight against. We need to be aware of this, not in order to stop teaching it, but to make it more effective in today’s conditions.

My parents and I came from Poland after the war; France welcomed us. I never suffered anti-Semitism. Neither Islam, nor Vichy, were a part of our family history. But Israel, yes.

The shift of France’s diplomatic stance toward Israel during the Six Day war traumatised me. Then, in 1970, we began to see the first Vietnam-Palestine committees on our university campuses: Israel had become an

imperialist State, the small Satan following the big American Satan. And finally, the UN assimilated Zionism with racism and France remained timid about it. That is when I began to become a militant.

Since those days, I have seen the development of a phenomenon that I still fail to grasp, which is to say the selective demonisation of Israel. If the demonstrations against Israel that come from Muslims, with a large sweep between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, can be qualified as anti-Semitic, if we can qualify as anti-Semitic the attacks against the Shoah, what are we to say when those who accept the State of Israel - and who are therefore Zionist - criticise Israel beyond all measure because it does not behave as they would have it behave? They refuse to see that this State has security constraints, that it operates based on a democratic process and that they would never dare to criticise with the same relentlessness any other State on the face of the planet. I call this Israelophobia. It is pathological. It is a contagious disease, which spreads easily among predisposed constituencies such as journalists, teachers, magistrates, and more rarely politicians, in other words, among opinion makers. It is correlated with nostalgia for the anti-imperialistic struggles of previous generations and it draws its strength in part from a kind of fault ethic. Israel's fault is the fault of the West, but atoning for one's faults is easier to do by beating someone else's breast...

As the President of CRIF, I was confronted with innumerable expressions of Israelophobia. I suppose that the president of the British Board has a similar experience.

The Al Dura affair was emblematic in this respect: a French national television report which was broadcast all over the world, showing in September 2000 a Palestinian child killed in Gaza purportedly by Israeli soldiers who it was said kept him under fire for 45 minutes. The report played a major role in generating vocations of suicide bombers and a disgust for Israel in public opinion.

I am convinced that the report is false. Analysis has shown that the fire could not have come from Israeli soldiers and that it was almost certainly an edited montage. The television channel has never accepted an inquiry and no political leader has ever dared to ask for one, for fear of triggering an angry response from journalists. Those who did dare to challenge the politically correct opinion have risked their career and their reputation. Those who claim the right to free speech are sometimes far from applying it to themselves.

My personal engagement in this case has so far been a failure. But I

don't regret, because this failure has taught me much and I have a sense of having done my duty. But I'm not sure that events would have unfolded in the same way in your country.

Two days ago, I learned that the University of Paris in Saint-Denis had, to all intents and purposes, stopped its Hebrew courses and accepted to have a day dedicated to studying apartheid in Israel. I'm sure you'll appreciate the symbol! And yet, until now French universities had been relatively spared such propaganda.

This fixation on Israel, which does not come from the political world, requires a response from the Jewish community and not just from Israel's embassies. It is in fact providing an incentive for many Jews to leave the country. Even more, it conveys a mix of complacencies, illusions and relative values which are a danger to our societies as a whole. By fighting for Israel, I am convinced that we are also fighting for our respective countries.

We should not forget that down through history paradigms change. Sympathy for Marxism has disappeared, and Israelophobia will disappear when confronted with the facts.

To support this change, we must strengthen our media presence and expression, develop alliances, involve young people who have been trained in leadership skills, debating techniques and new technologies. And we should never forget that over and above our actions at a national level, over and above our coordination at the European level, the driver for our action lies in the fact that we belong to the same Jewish people whose home is Israel.

Richard PRASQUIER

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Vision 2020: Leading British Jewry into the Future

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