

Dark forces are stirring

Rising anti-Semitism in Europe may soon have consequences for our own community.

NORMATIVE Jewish life in Europe is unsustainable.” (European Jewish Congress president Moshe Kantor).

“The Jews in Europe do not have a future.” (Hebrew University’s Professor Robert Wistrich, author of *The Longest Hatred*).

It’s time for Australian Jews to consider more closely what’s happening in Europe. Things are going from bad to worse for Jews there. And so perhaps sooner than we think, we may have to be ready to receive a new kind of Jewish migration.

Not of Jews leaving to seek a better economic future. And not, for that matter, of Jews fleeing violence against them, or around them, although what’s happening in Ukraine should give us pause. The comparisons with Europe in the 1930s are inevitable and understandable, but they are not only exaggerated, they are misleading. Because they obscure what’s really happening.

The new migration will be by Jews who want to be Jews openly; who want to feel safe in the streets without fear of attack or abuse; who want to maintain circumcision, keep kosher meat slaughter, and wear a kippah publicly. And who want to support Israel without being discriminated against in the media, universities and public life.

It won’t be a mass emigration, Soviet Jewry style. It’s not about to happen in a rush. But neither is it about a small minority in isolated Jewish communities. The EU’s own human rights survey last November showed that almost a third of Jews in France, Hungary, Belgium and Sweden are thinking about emigration. And if, for example, only 10,000 European Jews emigrated to Australia by 2020, that would mean around a 10 per cent increase in our community.

The rise of anti-Semitism in Europe is not new. We can trace the disturbing signs for a decade and more. But more recently we seem to have reached a tipping point. Anti-Jewish sentiment in around half of the 28 EU countries has morphed into active abuse, public and private; sections of the media are more stridently anti-Israel and often clearly anti-Semitic; and previously fringe anti-Jewish political parties have come to the fore.

As *The AJN* went to press this week, the results of the May 22 elections to the European Parliament were not yet known.

Maybe, as you read this column, the radical right parties from 12 EU countries haven’t gained a 20 per cent increase in seats as predicted. Maybe the “new far right”, such as France’s National Front led by Marine le Pen and Sweden’s Democrats, also haven’t done as disturbingly well as predicted.

But there is little doubt that darker forces are stirring in Europe.

Partisan



SAM LIPSKI

As London’s *Daily Telegraph* (17/05) noted, the “new far right” has consigned “the jackboots, skin-heads and slogans” to the past and replaced them with sharp suits and ties.

While it may be dressed up, however, “far-right 2.0” is changing the EU’s political landscape, with potentially serious consequences for ethnic minorities, Jews clearly among them. Even when the far right’s main targets are Muslims.

Last week, I was in Amsterdam at a conference of international Jewish foundations. As in other countries, Dutch Jews are caught between the virulently anti-Israel left and openly displayed Islamist hatred on one side, and the far right’s anti-Semitism on the other.

Holland’s Chief Rabbi Benjamin Jacobs is on record claiming there is no future for his community. This in the country where the queues to visit the Anne Frank House stretch for many city blocks.

Holland’s Chief Rabbi Benjamin Jacobs is on record claiming there is no future for his community.

Of the quotes above, the most recent is Kantor’s, commenting on a study by the Kantor Centre for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University. Released on April 28, it preceded – and supported – the blockbuster Anti-Defamation League study on May 12, which claimed that anti-Semitism was alive globally – and all too well.

We can be sceptical, of course, about such surveys. After all, Jews have form when it comes to believing: “Surely things can’t be that bad.” And an optimist would say that surveys only point to trends, and trends can change for the better, as they have done for worse.

But some European Jews are also voting with their feet. In this year’s first quarter there was a fourfold increase of French Jews arriving in Israel. The “Apartments for Sale” notices on Tel Aviv’s Ben Yehuda Street are in French. And it’s expected that some 5000 French Jews will make aliyah this year, the largest number since 1948.

Yet looking ahead, not all departing French Jews, or those from Hungary, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and other countries will choose Israel. They will look elsewhere. Which is why, for Australian Jews, attention must be paid.

Sam Lipski is chief executive of the Pratt Foundation and a former editor of *The AJN*.