

Intervention

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On anti-Semitism and the Greek media

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It is a fact that, when compared to other European and non-European countries, all recent research surveys of public opinion show high rates of anti-Semitism in Greece and a broad adoption of anti-Jewish stereotypes.

Anti-Semitic graffiti on the Greek island of Andros.

However, at the same time, it is important to underline that the level of anti-Semitic violence in Greece is lower compared to other European countries, such as France, Great Britain, Belgium, Denmark and Sweden.

Anti-Semitism is not a 'Jewish problem'. It begins with Jews, but does not come to an end with the Jews. Therefore, the fight against anti-Semitism can only be a product of cooperation between all the social and political forces that seek to shield the values of a modern democracy.

1.

In 2009, a political party leader, with parliamentary representation and two years later member of the governing coalition of Greece, stated that "the Jew smells blood." There was almost no reaction to this statement in the Greek media (apart from an article written by the journalist Paschos Mandravelis). It is a sign of tolerance against a statement that even the leader of the Nazi propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, would have envied. On the contrary, the party leader and party executives had long-standing invitations to many Greek media and they were never asked any questions about this statement.

The court case process of Konstantinos Plevris for his book 'The Jews: The Whole Truth' ended up with an acquittal verdict for the writer, with the basic argument being that with his quotes in the book he targeted 'Zionist Jews' and not Jews in general. During successive trials, and while the court heard grotesque comments and views about the Jews and their sacred texts, an almost absolute silence prevailed in the media, with the column of Dimitris Psarras, a member of the "IOS" research team, being probably the only light in this darkness.

The same party leader on 15 May 2013 stated on the ART TV channel that "There are no poor Jews. Anyone who knows a Greek Jew who is poor can come and tell me..." and "They [the Jews] are the only ones that had not been affected by the economic crisis." There was no reaction to these statements and no comment in any media the next day.

A metropolitan of the Greek Orthodox Church stated - almost undisturbed - in a TV station with a nation-wide audience that the Holocaust was a myth, a conspiracy of the Jews, while another metropolitan did not hesitate to have his photo taken on the side of the leader of the neo-Nazi party and self-declared Holocaust denier.

All these are just some examples illustrating Greek media's tolerant attitude towards manifestly intolerant and anti-Semitic phenomena.

2.

The term 'Zionists' is used deliberately, so that journalists and media cannot be accused of anti-Semitism, pretending they do not attack the Jews but the Zionists. Hence the term 'Jewish Zionist' established by Konstantinos Plevris. This is the modern form of anti-Semitism and it is used both by the extreme-right and milieus of the left who want to delegitimize the very right of the State of Israel to exist.

Articles and cartoons in Greek daily newspapers contribute to the construction of a stereotype based on the amalgam between 'Jews', 'Zionists' and 'the Nazis', assimilating the former with the latter, in a context of frenetic demonization of the State of Israel, presenting the people of Israel as the reincarnation of Absolute Evil.

It is the foundation stone of what is called 'New Anti-Semitism'. It is the consequence of a propaganda that has run out of control and employs harsh executioners who now do not attack only Jewish targets but also the centers of European civilization, using exactly the same methods of terrorizing the citizens of Israel.

When, according to research, 65 percent of respondents agree with the view that "Israel behaves to the Palestinians just as the Nazis behaved to the Jews", all the politicians and journalists in this propaganda industry aimed at delegitimizing Israel should assume their responsibilities.

'Traditional Anti-Semitism' questions and demonstrates the individual right of every Jew to live as an equal member of a society. 'New Anti-Semitism' questions and demonizes the collective right of Jews to live as an equal nation in the land of Israel, within the society of the nations. And it is obvious that even the harshest criticism of a particular policy of the Israeli government has nothing to do with anti-Semitism.

'No one questions when Jews are killed because they are Jews', wrote the editor of Charlie Hebdo, in an article published in the magazine's special edition on the first anniversary of the deadly attack against the magazine's offices and against a the kosher store in Paris.

"We are so used to watch Jews being killed just because they are Jews," Gerard Biard wrote. "This is an error, and not just on a human level. In every terrorist attack it is the executioner who decides who is a Jew and who isn't. 13 November the proof of that. On that day, the executioner showed us that he had decided that we were all Jews."

3.

Our answer is summarized in one word: Education.

Education also means information. And in that point the role of media is crucial.

Over the last years, most media outlets have been highlighting the plight of Nazism in Greece and Europe. The Holocaust is no longer considered a Jewish affair, but as a historical fact that concerns mankind as a whole. Beyond oppressors and victims, it was the vast majority of societies that stayed apathetic, silent, in front of the extermination. Many people even benefited from the extinction of the Jews.

So, as long as there are still media outlets that broadcast the testimony of Esther Cohen, the 90-year-old Holocaust survivor who remembers that "Not a single neighbor even peeked

through the curtains" when the Germans were dragging the Jews of Ioannina through the streets; when she returned home she faced the hatred of the new «self-willing owner» of her house and the threat that "she may have got away from the ovens in Germany, but he himself will cook her right here in her own oven" and the journalists do not hesitate to assume responsibility on the behalf of the local society, then the media can be a way of stopping the rise of neo-Nazism and fascism in Greece. In order to achieve that, it is necessary that the ESIEA journalists union prepare a code of ethics that would strictly restrict the broadcasting of anti-Semitic stereotypes.

At the same time, it is necessary that opinion makers realize their responsibility when they contribute to the promotion and the development of anti-Semitic hatred.

For example, hundreds of social media posts by Islamists promote as heroes both the terrorists of Paris and the 'knife attackers' in Israel, celebrating the "magnificent victory that leads the executioners to paradise." At the same time, others project and reproduce undisturbed slanders of the type "Jews do not pay taxes." So, should a responsible government not complain to Google about hate posts leading to the bloodshed of innocent citizens in her country? Or in the cultivation of hate?

How tolerant can be a society that wants to prosper against a so-called 'internet freedom' that threatens the elementary human rights of its citizens? Maybe we should ask whether the terrorists and their neo-Nazi allies have a terror contract with the internet that allows them to use the free movement of ideas and images to spread hatred and death?
