



THE PR OFFICE ^[PRO]

Conference of European Rabbis Coverage Update 3rd November 2017





Publication: Newsweek Online

Date: 01.11.17

1/3

FAR RIGHT SUPPORTS ISRAEL IN PLOY TO WIN RESPECTABILITY, EUROPE'S TOP RABBI WARNS

Far-right populist groups across Europe are seeking a “kosher stamp” of approval from the Jewish community to bolster their legitimacy—and they’re claiming to support Israel as a tactic to get it, one of the continent’s most senior Jewish leaders has warned.

Speaking to *Newsweek* during a visit to London for Shabbat U.K., Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, urged his co-religionists to fight intolerance against all faiths. Rising intolerance, he said, could only spell harm for Europe’s Jewish communities.

Goldschmidt, who is the also chief rabbi of Moscow, said America's withdrawal from world affairs, and the country’s reluctance under Donald Trump to promote liberal values around the world, has created a “vacuum” in Europe that is breeding disunity.

In Austria, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and a host of other European countries, hard-right parties that demonize Islam and Muslims and propose crackdowns on the freedom of religion, including bans on the face veil, minarets or halal meat, have made electoral gains in recent years.

Some of these policies have even been introduced by mainstream governments.

Far-right parties like Austria’s Freedom Party, which is engaged in coalition talks that may take it into government, make much of pro-Israel rhetoric, which their supporters use as a sign that they have shed any past associations with anti-Semitic fascism.

“In German there's a word,” Goldschmidt says, “*salonfähig*. *Salonfähig* means a certain issue becomes respected enough that you can mention this in a salon, with respectable company.





Publication: Newsweek Online

Date: 01.11.17

2/3

“Those parties are trying to become a respected part of society, and having a 'kosher stamp' from the Jewish community, and/or from Israel, is extremely important for them.

“In Austria, [Freedom Party leader Heinz-Christian] Strache tried to do it with the Jewish community and didn't succeed, and tried to go over their heads directly to Israel.

“But I would say that Israel has been until now, I would say wise enough not to give credibility to those forces without the consent of the local Jewish community.”

An open letter from leading Austrian Jews earlier this month urged Israel to “respect” its call for the Freedom Party to be excluded from any coalition, the [Jerusalem Post](#) reported.

Newsweek asked Goldschmidt whether he thought the election of Donald Trump—whose campaign rhetoric against Islam was backed by parties such as France's National Front and the Netherlands' Party for Freedom—had emboldened European politicians to adopt more anti-Islamic policies.

“U.S. foreign policy is going through an isolationist period,” Goldschmidt said, “and the fact that the voice of Washington is not heard on all those issues which have to do with racism, [has left] a huge vacuum, in Europe especially.”

As for what Europe's Jewish communities should do to fight extremism, Goldschmidt says that while radical Islam is a serious problem: “We in the Conference of European Rabbis have been taking a very strong position on this; we have said, and we say this before every election in every country: Islam is not our enemy.

“The Jews lived under Muslim rule for 1,500 years and, in general, they lived better and with less persecution under Muslim countries,” Goldschmidt says.





Publication: Newsweek Online
Date: 01.11.17
3/3

U.S. EDITION

Newsweek

“I wouldn’t say it was the garden of Eden,” the chief rabbi adds. “There was persecution. But compared to what Jews went through in Christian countries, even without including the Holocaust as the last chapter of a terrible history... Jews were able to survive to some extent, to a greater extent, and thrive.”

Goldschmidt says that Jews should strive to be “pillars of memory, of saying: ‘remember what happened here 70 years ago, remember what happened to us 70 years ago.’”

“To quote Elie Wiesel: ‘Auschwitz was not built by bricks, Auschwitz was built by words,’” Goldschmidt continued, “and the moment that you allow the basic assumptions and values on which Europe was built after World War II to disappear—that’s when everything that happened could happen again.”

