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THE OPINIONATOR
GEDALIA GUTTENTAG



Jonathan Arkush, president of the British Board of Deputies

"You have to be careful about drawing too many threads together on this question. There's a great gulf between Britain and Europe. British Jews have deep roots in the country, they feel British. France is different. The Jews there are mostly immigrants from North Africa who identify as Jews who live in France. Their problems with militant Islamists are much more serious.

"I'm broadly confident about a Jewish future in Britain because of its traditional tolerance for minorities. But I'm not so confident about the Scandinavian countries, where there is a genuine freestrom — as you see in Iceland — caused by militant secularism. They're suffering there from a highly illiberal liberalism. Anything they don't agree with, like milah and shechitah, they want to ban. They don't have enough regard for religious rights."



Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president, Conference of European Rabbis

"Two years ago, I would have said that radical Islamic terrorism is Europe's main problem. Today that's changed. In 2017 we saw — with a few exceptions — that European security services have got their act together. Emigration from France has stabilized. There's a future there.

"Now, issues of religious freedom — including a new onslaught against milah and shechitah that is more ferocious than before — are the main threat.

"The worry is that Iceland will be a precedent for Scandinavia over the milah legislation. It's because of Iceland's tiny Jewish population that they actually chose it as the target to attack milah. It could provide a domino effect for the rest of Europe. I'm in touch with leaders of Muslim countries to fight this together.

"Although Europe's security issues seem to have stabilized, it's the religious rights issue that's not going to go away and is the biggest threat to the Jewish future in Europe."

Lawmakers in Iceland have proposed a total ban on ritual circumcision for anyone under the age of 18. Jewish leaders are outraged over the bill, calling it an effective end to Jewish life in the island nation.

A similar law was enacted and then overturned in Germany in 2012. Not since Nazi times has bris milah been banned in Europe. All of this comes on the back of a recent Polish law that outlaws any insinuation of Poland responsibility for the Holocaust.

Though Iceland's Jewish community is tiny, the threat to Jewish freedoms everywhere is great. Once again, Jewish leaders are asking themselves:

Is there a future for Jews in Europe?



Manfred Gerstenfeld, emeritus chairman of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

"The future of European Jewry is clouded for a variety of reasons. The long anti-Semitic history of Europe means that anti-Semitism is part of the continent's culture. Decades after the Holocaust, the old ideas are coming back again. This is strengthened by the massive import of refugees and economic immigrants from Muslim countries where most have anti-Semitic attitudes.

Reactions of Jews depend on personal attitudes. The sizable departure of Jews from France is also influenced by the economic problems in the country. Much depends on the possibility of



Shimon Cohen, director, Shechitah UK

"Let's understand what's happening in Europe. From the 1960s to the 1990s there was no religious awareness in Western Europe. Since the mid-2000s, we've had a religious decade, but wholly negative due to 9/11 and the Iraq wars.

"Europe's growing liberal society has led to two colliding philosophies: deeply religious versus deeply secular. The Muslims have championed public faith in the 21st century, and they have no desire to integrate. Since it's no longer polite to say, 'I hate Muslims', the alternative is to restrict Muslim life. So the Jewish community across Europe is suffering collateral damage.

"When I go to far-right politicians in Europe — all of whom support Israel — and say, 'Don't you

realize that your legislation hurts Jews?' they say they can't help it.

"That's the reason things are not looking good in Scandinavia. Denmark banned shechitah despite not having it for ten years, which is absurd. There, it is liberalism at play.

"In Poland, the government is merely seeking to enforce an existing law that allows shechitah for food, but not export. Despite the Polish government's controversial Holocaust law, I hesitate to link the two without proof. It's about opposition to making money through shechitah.

"In the UK, things have never been so good for Jews. It's commonplace to wear a kippah for work, and shechitah and milah are protected. France is a major issue due to Muslim anti-Semitism, but Jewish society is strong. Overall here in Europe, we have to work hard, but there's a future."

adapting abroad — not only in Israel, but also in the United States and Canada, countries where French Jews also emigrate to.

"Although things are better in the UK, much can change if a Labor government comes to power.

"We know that Chabad is determined to hold on as long as there are Jews to help. The rabbi of Malmo in Sweden, which is the most anti-Semitic city in Europe, has said that if he had known how bad it was, he wouldn't have come, but now he will stay to help the remaining Jews.

"It's clear that the Jewish future in Europe is not good, and also that percentage-wise, the more people are associated with active Jewish life, the more likely they are to leave."





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JEWISH FAMILY WEEKLY



Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president, Conference of European Rabbis

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Iceland's decision to drop anti-bris Bill warmly welcomed

Layla Bell

Iceland's withdrawal of a highly controversial bill to ban bris mila that appeared before its parliament earlier this year has been warmly welcomed.

The bill, which proposed a six-year jail sentence for anyone who either practised or organised bris mila, aroused a storm of protest that went far beyond Iceland. In a letter to the Icelandic embassy in Washington, members of the US Congress, Ed Royce in California and Eliot Engle in New York called on the government of Iceland to reconsider this retrograde move.

They argued that "while Jewish and Muslim populations in Iceland may be small, your country's ban could be exploited by those who stoke xenophobia and anti-Semitism in countries with more diverse

populations". At only 0.1%, the Jewish population of Iceland is tiny but the fear is that allowing the bill to become enshrined in law could establish an unacceptable example.

Dr Simon Hochhauser, the Co-chair of Milah UK which promotes and protects the right of the Jewish community to carry out religious circumcision, has welcomed Iceland's change of thought. "We welcome the common sense decision of the Icelandic Parliament to drop this bill which would have criminalised law abiding Jews and Muslims and their traditions. This result follows extensive lobbying by Milah UK, its European partners and supporters from other faiths working very closely in step."

The Conference of European Rabbis (CER) lobbied vehemently against the bill. At a conference in Iceland organised by Protestant and

Catholic European groups, CER President, Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, said "The Nazis enacted such a law in 1933 and we know how it ended. This move is not only a violation of the basic human right to freedom of religion or belief, but a sign that people of Jewish or Muslim background are not welcome in Iceland."

On hearing that the bill had been withdrawn, Rabbi Goldschmidt commented "This battle is over, but not the war. I think that the international pressure has made them back off, but the fight for milah and shechita as well, is going to continue around Europe."

With its decision to vote on a non-binding motion to ban the practice of bris mila, Denmark will become the first member of the European Union to follow this path. The draft bill refers only to child welfare without taking



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Milah UK's Simon Hochhauser welcomed "common sense decision"

into account the immutable traditions of religious practice. As Iceland originally did, it wants to invoke a six year prison term for Danish citizens involved in the practice of bris mila whether it took place in Denmark or not.

The bill's promoters introduced an amendment that if the proposal received 50,000 signatures within six months of its posting on the parliamentary website, a figure it has already overtaken, it could become a non-binding draft motion in parliament.

In the wake of the decision in 2014 that shechita cannot take place without pre-stunning, this poses yet another blow for Denmark's 9000 Jewish citizens, one that could well mark the end of the Danish Jewish community.

Critics have expressed the view that the move against bris mila is not motivated by child welfare as much as it is by dislike of Jews and Muslims and that banning religious practices such as shechita and bris mila is a creative way of hitting back.

"If we succeeded in stopping it in Iceland, we can in other places too," the rabbi concluded.





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Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt: KEHILLOS MUST WORK WITH POLITICIANS

Chief Rabbi of Moscow and President of the Conference of European Rabbis (CER),
Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt visited London last week.

Hamodia was privileged to spend some time with him discussing the situation of the Jewish community in Europe.

BY VICKI BELOVSKI



Hamodia: Many senior European politicians have gone on record as being supportive of the Jewish people and their right to practice *Yiddishkeit* freely. They make public statements such as, "Europe would not be Europe without its Jewish community." But if you look at the laws, or proposed laws, in numerous places — against *schechita*, against *milch*, against wearing religious items in public places — this doesn't seem to be the case. What do you think? Are these politicians being genuine, and the anti-religious laws have been proposed or enacted by others, or are they just saying what people want to hear?

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt: Many European politicians who say that Europe without Jews isn't Europe really do mean it. Europe has lost out socially, economically, ecologically since World War II because of the loss of its Jews.

However, what is happening is that European politicians are basically dealing with significant threats to the European future, which are the terrorist threat and the refugee crisis. And it's being dealt with on a very broad scope. Instead of recognizing and dealing with the core of the problem, they are going on a broadside attack against Islam in particular and religion in general, in which we are the collateral damage.

This very unsophisticated and crude reflex of Europe is impacting on us and is threatening our future in Europe. This is our challenge as European Rabbis and leaders: to talk to politicians and explain to them that not only are their policies not going to stop the problem, but that they are going to augment the problem. It is a difficult role but we are having some success in some countries — for example, we just heard this week that the potential ban on *bris milah* in Iceland has been overturned. In other countries in Europe we are in the middle of the battle.

Hamodia: Do you think that politicians really understand what they are doing when they say, "No more *schechita*, no more *bris milch*?" Do they think it's just a quaint tradition? Or that we could eat something else, or get meat from somewhere else? Or, to take another example — the huge issues that we are having in the U.K. with *chitzuch* now — do they think that we will just change everything we teach?

RPG: Let's take Iceland as an example. Iceland had virtually no Jewish community and only a few hundred Muslims. Had there been a Jewish community in Iceland who could have spoken up, then the international community would not have needed to get involved. So it's often the very small or weak

communities which are targeted, and that's the reason why we are facing this challenge. And more than that, I think it's important to understand something. Today, because of the internet, there are no walls.

It used to be that people didn't know what was happening in their next-door neighbour's backyard. Today, you can find all sorts of information online and if you look up "circumcisions" the chances are that you won't find pictures of a *bris* in a shed, but something far less tranquil and more traumatic. So any rational person who sees this is going to think, I don't want this in my country. Now, we can explain that it's carried out by skilled experts on a baby, in a controlled environment, and so on. But, the picture they have seen is far more powerful than anything we can explain and it has an impact on public opinion and by extension on the passage of laws.

Another issue is that in the EU, the local decision makers are several layers away from the European Parliament or Commission. I don't doubt for one minute that either President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani or (First Vice-President) Frans Timmermans (who were both awarded prizes by the CER last month) are genuine in their concern and affection for the Jewish community. But they were also both quite open in saying that due to the way in which the EU administration works, there is very little they can do about threats to religious practice in one region of a specific country.

This is one of the key functions of the CER — to ensure that local Jewish communities across Europe have the infrastructure to deal with situations like this and with the political necessities on a local level.

Hamodia: We often talk about the Jewish community being "collateral damage."

Other groups of people carry out religious practices which countries find distasteful, or have education systems which are a concern to the authorities. But in order to treat everyone equally and not to discriminate, it's necessary to pass new laws or regulations which also have an adverse effect on the Jewish community, even though they were not the original target.

RPG: That's a very interesting point. Nowadays in a democracy, the government can't say, "This is the rule for the Jews, this is the rule for the Muslims and this is the rule for the Christians." Like they used to do before Emanicipation. Austria, on the other hand, has separate contracts between the government and the different religious communities — one contract with the Jewish community and a different one with the Muslim community, each tailored to the specific needs of the community and the concerns of the government. This would be totally unthinkable in the U.K.

Hamodia: Absolutely!

RPG: But the makeup of the parliament in Austria is quite different — the Far Right parties are part of the government there. In general, in Europe, the Far Right has much more power than it does in the U.K. There is significant concern in mainland Europe that due to the number of refugee countries are losing their national identity. Public opinion in Europe has become much more right-wing over the last year or so, than it is in the U.K.

The U.K. over the last thousand years has not seen the revolutions and turmoil which Europe has seen. It has had a very balanced stabilising effect on Europe. Europe is much less stable than the U.K.



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Even disregarding the world wars, inside the countries it is much less stable. And therefore, their reactions to their challenges are much more extreme. Think how the entrance of Jews into German culture was met with such violence, culminating in Nazism. In the 1920s, nine out of 20 Nobel prize winners in Germany were Jews! And the Jews at the time wanted to assimilate into German society. Now there are 40 million Muslims in the EU; there is potentially a huge amount of uncertainty ready to happen, whether physical violence or political uncertainty. We are only at the beginning of this *parashah*.

Hamodia: How do you recommend dealing with these sort of challenges?

RPG: For many years and in many different countries, the Jewish community has found ways to negotiate with the authorities or government, and I'm sure that here also they will be able to do so.

Hamodia: Is the rise of populist or Far Right parties that you mentioned earlier something that we should be worried about? Now, perhaps, they are opposed to more recent immigrants. Is it only a matter of time until, as in some countries, they start to show anti-Semitic tendencies?

RPG: The Far Right parties, with the exception of in Greece and Hungary, openly say that they are not anti-Semitic. Not only do they say this, but they try to find ways to build relationships with Israel and with Israeli politicians. They try to include some Jewish politicians in their parties.

The problems are these: One – many of these parties were founded by former SS officers or by Nazi collaborators. Two – they are openly racist. Three – there are many pockets of anti-Semitism in these parties. For example, in the Far Right parties in Austria and Germany, there are people who say that the Holocaust was just a blip in the

1,000 year history of Germany; or that the Holocaust memorial in the middle of Berlin is a disgrace for Germany. In other words, within those parties, you have a very strong anti-Semitic presence, even though they try to hide it. And, finally, in the fight against *shechitah* and *milah* – they are all against *shechitah* and *milah*.

But, they are pro-Israel, anti-Hamas...

Hamodia: In the U.K. these parties are looked on very suspiciously by everyone, including the Jewish community. Even if they support Israel, there are many people who say: Given their attitudes in other areas, we don't want their support in this one.

RPG: In Austria they are in the coalition. In Germany they have 30 percent of the vote, in Netherlands they are the second biggest party...

Hamodia: That's surprising. You'd think it of some other countries, but not of Holland.

RPG: This is caused by the fear of the invasion of the Middle East into their country. And in France, Marine Le Pen almost became the President of France. And she still might – if Macron falls with his reforms, she could become the next president.

And there's another problem, which is that today we have a President of the U.S.A. whose people officially endorsed those Far Right parties. Just now the American Ambassador to Germany said that we have to work together with those parties. So we live in a totally changed world.

Hamodia: What impact do you think President Trump will have on Europe? Obviously, people have to work with him on a political level...



Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt writing a letter in a new safer Torah.

RPG: When he was elected, I said, "This president will be good for Israel and bad for Europe." And that's exactly what we can see happening. I think that the relationship between Europe and America is going to get even worse.

Hamodia: How?

RPG: In terms of NATO and other political alliances, for example. Last Shabbos I was in Riga with the AIPAC delegation. We met with the Speaker of Parliament there [Ināra Mārniece]. She was saying that they want to know – if Russia attacks them, will America come to their defence, as set out in

the NATO terms? And the American ambassador there, Nancy Bikoff Pettit, said, "Of course." But at the same time, in Canada, at the G7 conference, President Trump was saying, "OK, let's get Russia back into G7." So, we have two totally different and conflicting messages, which is a destabilising factor in Europe.

Hamodia: Returning to a more local issue – the *chinuch* crisis here. You have a great deal of experience in dealing with governments and crises of this sort. Do you have any practical suggestions for dealing with it?

RPG: This doesn't affect only Jewish schools. It affects schools of other faiths too, such as Muslims and Catholics, and now is the time to build bridges with them. I believe that those three faiths are strong enough in the U.K. to come together and speak to the government.

The challenges of the U.K. in 2018 are different from those of Romania or Lithuania in the 1980s. It has always been the great success of the Jewish community that whatever community or era they were living in, they have been able to find the correct method to survive and to flourish and overcome the particular set of challenges.

Hamodia: Do you have a message for the U.K. community?

RPG: Generals always like to fight current wars in the same way as they fought previous wars, using the same weapons and the same tactics, without realizing that the enemy has changed. We must realise this and be flexible, adapting our tactics to face current challenges, rather than using the same old tactics each time. In this way, like our ancestors, with the help of Hashem, we will be able to respond to the situation as it is and overcome each new challenge that faces us. ■



Chief Rabbi of Moscow Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of Conference of European Rabbis, speaking at an interfaith conference in Djerba, Tunisia.

