



Publication: The Jerusalem Post (online)
Date: 24.11.18
1/4

SHOULD JEWS AND ISRAEL ENGAGE WITH EUROPE'S POPULIST, FAR-RIGHT PARTIES?

Jews and Israel cannot give kashrut stamp to far-right parties, warns Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, head of the Conference of European Rabbis.



RABBI PINCHAS GOLDSCHMIDT: Jews become the collateral damage. (photo credit: FABRIZIO BENSCH / REUTERS)

Recent years have seen a rapid rise in the electoral success of populist, right-wing, and far-right parties across Europe, riding on a wave of resentment toward migrants and refugees, the EU and its bureaucracy, and an antiestablishment fervor that has taken hold across the Western world.

Many of these parties have expressed and advanced staunchly anti-Islamic rhetoric and policies, whether in Germany, due to the huge number of Muslim refugees allowed into the country, or in Eastern Europe, where few if any refugees have been allowed in but where their shadow has bolstered nationalist, anti-immigrant sentiment.





Publication: The Jerusalem Post (online)
Date: 24.11.18
2/4

THE JERUSALEM POST

Some of these parties have, however, given strong backing to Israel, and the less extreme ones, such as the ruling Law and Justice Party in Poland, have developed strong ties to the Jewish state.

The AfD in Germany has even developed a Jewish "working group" which was established in October this year by a small number of German Jews.

These concerns have raised questions as to whether Jewish communities and Israel should engage with such parties, and how to distinguish between those that are antisemitic, racist, or have a more benign, albeit hard-line, agenda.

ON A visit to Israel, Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the [Conference of European Rabbis](#), the primary association of Orthodox European rabbis, said that he believes that Jewish communities and the State of Israel can in no way engage with these kinds of political parties if they express or endorse not only antisemitic but also racist rhetoric and policies.

The courting of Israel and local Jewish communities by some parties is, Goldschmidt believes, a transparent attempt to get a stamp of approval from European Jews to bolster their claims that they are not in fact racist.

"Why are they [the far-right parties] seeking us? There are more than 40 million Muslims and 1.6 million Jews in Europe. Do they need our votes? I don't think they need our votes. They need our kosher stamp," he said.

"The moment we Jews give them our kosher stamp, then they'll say: 'These Jews, they support us, how can we be antisemitic? How can we be racist? But let's forbid Islam, kick the Muslims out, cut their beards off, take off their hijabs, make them vegans, and stop them from circumcising.'"

Goldschmidt was strongly critical of any position in which European Jewish communities or organizations could engage with such parties despite racist rhetoric and policies toward other minorities.

"We were the biggest victims of racism in the last century. Are we going to say we're okay with racism? Is this a moral position?" he demanded.

Goldschmidt said, however, that parties that are opposed to immigration, or want to break away from the EU, for example, are legitimate and should not be ostracized, even if the local Jewish communities do not agree with their agendas.





Publication: The Jerusalem Post (online)
Date: 24.11.18
3 / 4

THE JERUSALEM POST

"No country can be forced to take in refugees. Every country has the right to say, 'We don't want others coming here.' But the moment we're talking about [engaging with parties that talk of] restriction on freedom of religion and racism... I think people have forgotten that they are Jews," he asserted.

"And it always backfires... Jews become the collateral damage," he added.

The rabbi said that Israel's general policy of not engaging with the populist and far-right parties in Europe, if the local Jewish communities feel that they are beyond the pale, is correct and reasonable.

He added, however, that if one such party were to take power in a given country, and not just enter a coalition as a junior partner, it then may be necessary to engage with it for practical purposes, saying that the local Jewish community will have to live with the new reality.

GOLDSCHMIDT IS also concerned about the broader agenda of the populist and far-right parties, many of which seek to exit the European Union and threaten the democratic values and institutions of their own countries.

The rabbi notes that Jews have never been persecuted as Jews in a democracy, and argues that "liberal democracy, with all its failings and shortcomings and uncertainties," has guaranteed the survival and prosperity of the Jewish communities living among them.

And equally, the very existence of the EU and its goals of creating a more harmonious and fraternal European community to counter the national rivalries that led to the calamities of the First and Second World Wars, have had a side effect of reducing the "otherness" of Jews on the continent.

"The European Union made every country a minority within a greater context, so Jews as a minority were no longer the foreigner or stranger, the other," he says.

"Now this old world order is going through a lot of turbulence and is in danger of collapsing, so the uncertainty for the Jewish community is higher."

Goldschmidt said that the European populist parties "want to dismember the EU and bring the world back to 1914, with every country on its own," and that these parties and their agendas have given rise to "nationalism, populism and also antisemitism," because of the suspicion of Jews as "globalists and cosmopolitans."

He noted that over 90% of antisemitic crimes in Germany in 2017 were perpetrated by far-right individuals.





THE PR OFFICE ^{PRO}

Publication: The Jerusalem Post (online)
Date: 24.11.18
4/4

THE JERUSALEM POST

The rabbi said that he does not see any imminent mass emigration of European Jews from the continent, but said that should a far-right party attain power, such as Marine Le Pen's National Rally in France, the AfD in Germany, or even the Labour Party in the UK, which has become populist, hard-left, and anti-Israel under leader Jeremy Corbyn and harbors antisemites, then the situation could change.

"Postwar Europe in the 1960s and 1970s was just paradise and Jews were secure. But things have changed in the last 15 to 20 years, and Europe has again become riddled with antisemitism of different kinds, and Jews don't feel secure."

