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## A Few Minutes with Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt

Gedalia Guttentag

Conference of European Rabbis president Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt is clear that Europe's far right can't be part of the fight against discrimination

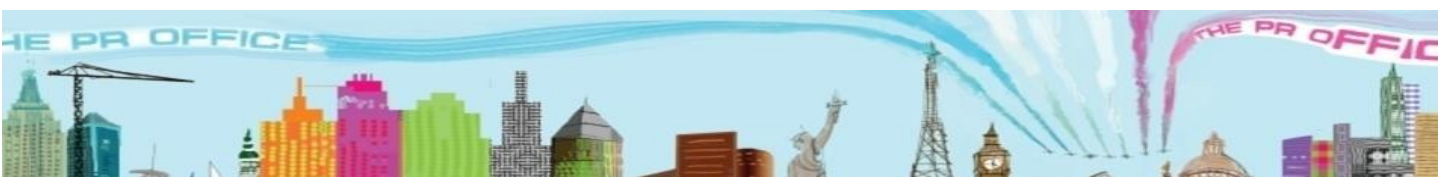
Wednesday, January 09, 2019



*On January 1, a law banning shechitah came into force in the Belgian region of Flanders, home to the major Jewish community of Antwerp. The law, which requires stunning of animals before slaughter, will take effect in the French-speaking region of Wallonia in September. It means that Belgium joins a growing list of European countries, including Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, that do not allow shechitah. The immediate effect has been to force Belgium's Jews to source meat from countries where shechitah is allowed. But as the home to the European Union, Belgium's fall to the anti-shechitah movement is ominous. As Belgian and European Jewish organizations prepare to fight the ban, Mishpacha spoke to Conference of European Rabbis president Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt about a comeback strategy, and the rise of Europe's far right.*

**T**he ban on shechitah in one of Europe's major Jewish centers came as shock to many observers. What political constellation brought about this law?

This law was passed in the Belgian regional parliaments almost unanimously. It was led by nationalists, who have adopted the agenda of the far right. This means that they have campaigned against immigration, and on an anti-Muslim platform. The Jewish community is collateral damage in the struggle against the Muslim community, including on the issue of shechitah. So these positions have moved from the fringes to the mainstream of European politics.





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**What is being done to reverse it locally and at the European level to prevent a domino effect?**

We fear this could have a domino effect elsewhere in Europe. Luxembourg has passed a similar law and they are considering the same in other places. So we're planning on fighting this on different levels.

Locally the Jewish and Muslim communities have appealed to Belgium's High Court to overturn the law. We're expecting a decision toward the end of January. But we're not yet going to the European Court of Human Rights because we've had bad experiences with them when we've talked about religious freedom issues.

Politically we're going to get involved by building bridges with other faith communities. The Jewish community in Belgium has had little or no contact with other faith communities there. But since there are half a million Muslims in Belgium, the Jewish community can bring changes to the law if it acts together with the Muslim community. We need to build as broad an alliance as possible.

**Just a few weeks ago, a European Union official used this forum to say that Europe without Jews wouldn't be Europe. Yet European parliaments feel free to enact laws that put Jewish life at risk. What's to be done to hold European leaders to their fine words?**

We have to make sure they understand that when they say they want to protect Europe's Jews, they have to give us the possibility to do so. I think the moment we raise these issues with them, it will be understood. We're going to talk to the president and parliament of the European Union. But we also have to remember that these laws come from individual countries, and we need to convince them that this is wrong.

It's going to be hard to persuade these political parties to reverse course. It will also take concentrated effort to get the body politic of Europe to recognize the needs of the Jewish community, both in terms of physical safety as well as issues of religious freedom. But it can be done.

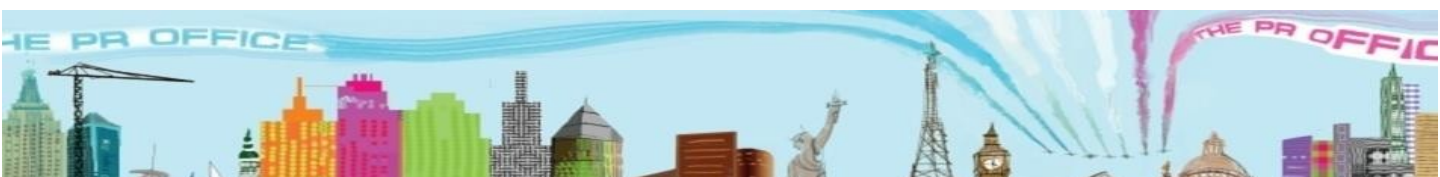
**In the last few months you've spoken out against association with Europe's far right, which some in the Jewish community have expressed interest in because of their strong stance against militant Islam. Which of Europe's political parties would you not work with, and why?**

I was talking primarily about Geert Wilders's party in Holland, the AfD in Germany, and Austria's Freedom Party. We should not be associating with them. Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz is not far right, and the jury is still out on what's happening in Italy's new political right. In general, not everyone who's my enemy's enemy should be my friend.

**But why can't these parties be a useful bulwark against the rise of militant Islam?**

The answer is: Do you want Nazis to fight radical Islam? Iran is also fighting radical Islam, but we would never endorse them. My definition of when we shouldn't support a party is if it engages in anti-Semitism, racism, Holocaust denial, or BDS. Those are beyond the pale.

**That's at a Jewish communal level. But should Israeli leaders not engage with these politicians since they are pro-Israel, purely out of realpolitik?**





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I don't say not to engage; just don't give a kosher shtempel. The government of Israel has to have relations with every country in the world, and has to meet everyone, from friend to foe. The issue is supporting and embracing them. When the government meets Hamas, it doesn't make them kosher. I think in politics you can see right away if we're talking about support or relationships.

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<http://www.mishpacha.com/Browse/Article/11790/A-Few-Minutes-with-Rabbi-Pinchas-Goldschmidt>

