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A worried Jewish community urges not to vote for extremists in the EU

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AFP / Archives / Jeff Pachoud



A forensic police officer examines a swastika painted on a street in the French city of Lyon on April 5, 2019

In the face of an eventual rise of populist and ultra-right forces in this week's European elections, the Jewish community in Europe expresses its concern over the outcome of the elections, in a context of increased anti-Semitism.

"We know perhaps better than anyone about what Europe was built after the Holocaust, about the horrors of war," Ariella Woitchik, director of the European Jewish Congress, told AFP, calling to vote "for a pro-European party."

More than 9 million Jews lived in Europe before the Second World War and the extermination of Jews. Currently, the figure fell below two million and the leaders of the Jewish community fear new marches.

"Peace should not be taken for granted," insists Woitchik in Brussels, where police continue to protect synagogues and businesses five years after four people lost their lives in the Jewish Museum at the hands of a French jihadist.

The concern of the community is not exaggerated. According to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, one third of the 16,000 Jews surveyed in Europe say they were harassed in 2018 and 3% say they have suffered a physical attack.

The European Commissioner for Justice, the Czech Vera Jourova, said in January that "when the Jews left Europe in the past, that was never a good sign of the state of Europe." They are not the only target.

Recently, the European Commission noted that "anti-Gypsyism" is on the rise and warned of "extreme discourses, even of politicians, and of the propagation of hate speech and false online news" against gypsies.





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- 'Emergency feeling' -

The Jews contemplate again leaving Europe. "The number of Jews has been reduced in the last 20 years, to 1.6 million," says Pinchas Goldschmidt, the great rabbi of Moscow and president of the rabbis of Europe.

Goldschmidt explains it for a "wave of terrorist acts in France, Belgium, Denmark and elsewhere" and considers important the European elections "to convey to Jews the message that they are still welcome in Europe."

Modern European parties, including those on the extreme right, seldom openly adopt an anti-Semitic discourse, but the recent election campaign has had a troubling background for the community.

In Hungary, the Jewish community accuses the Hungarian prime minister, the populist Viktor Orban, of inciting anti-Semitism for his campaign against the Hungarian-born American billionaire George Soros.

And in Poland, its leader, Mateusz Morawiecki, this week sparked outrage by declaring that if Warsaw paid compensation for goods stolen from Jews during the Holocaust, it would be a "posthumous victory" for Hitler.

This happened after an extreme right-wing candidate from Kielce interrupted a televised debate to try to place a kippah on the head of a candidate of the ruling party, declaring: "They kneel before the Jews."

For the president of the rabbis of Europe, the excesses of the campaign reflect a wider tendency to spread hate that has even seen German extremists marching with neo-Nazi symbols.

"Politicians are not afraid to resort to anti-Semitism when they need it," he says. "World War II is becoming a memory of the past and people are forgetting what it was like to live without a European Union."

The leaders of the Jewish community accept that many policies, although late, have begun to realize the magnitude of the problem, but the tone of the debate in Europe has generated new concern for them.

Woitchik speaks of a "feeling of anxiety in the Jewish community". "We have even spoken of a feeling of emergency because if things do not improve, people even consider leaving Europe."

<https://www.afp.com/es/noticias/17/una-preocupada-comunidad-judia-urge-no-votar-por-extremistas-en-la-ue-doc-1gs1952>

