



THE PR OFFICE ^[PRO]

Conference of European Rabbis

Coverage Update
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The New York Times

University Denounced for Showing Sign Language for 'Jewish' as a Hooked Nose



The University of Ghent in Belgium hosts a sign-language dictionary on a website that translates Flemish into Flemish sign language by video. EPA, via Shutterstock

By Milan Schreuer

Sept. 20, 2019



BRUSSELS — A university in Belgium has refused demands to “immediately” strip its website of Flemish sign-language videos displaying stereotypical and anti-Semitic symbols for Jews, saying it was merely hosting a dictionary of signs without adding “value





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judgment.”

Ghent University hosts the sign-language dictionary on a website that translates Flemish, the language spoken in Belgium's northern region of Flanders, into Flemish sign language by video.

According to the Flemish dictionary, there are [four ways](#) to sign the word “Jewish”: by stroking the chin; by stroking an imagined goatee; by mimicking bilateral pipe curls with the fingers; and by moving a hooked finger over the face — symbolizing a hooked nose. (A fifth video shows an exaggerated variant of the last sign.)

In a letter to the university last week, Rabbi Menachem Margolin, chairman of the European Jewish Association, urged the university to “clarify the situation” and remove the “offensive videos immediately;” after a Flemish Jewish family contacted him and expressed their “disgust” at coming across three videos when looking up words in sign language for fun.

“The first two appear to be standard sign language,” Rabbi Margolin said of the signs in the letter to the rector, Rik Van de Walle. “If the aim of this project was to embellish or add to the standard definition, it has certainly managed to so, in the most stereotypical and racist way imaginable, by focusing on side-locks and, worse still, gesticulating a hooked nose to describe a Jew.”

But the university, which has about 44,000 students and is publicly funded by the Flemish government, has declined to take any action. It said that it had discussed the complaints with the researchers who created the dictionary. But in a statement on Friday that was approved by Mr. Van de Walle, the university described the controversy as a purely “scientific issue.”





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It said that in creating the dictionary, researchers merely “register and describe the signs that are used in the Flemish sign language.” It added: “They don’t take position on these signs, and don’t cast a value judgment on them. This is what lexicographers do.”

The controversy comes amid a wider rise in anti-Semitism across Europe. And Belgium has been criticized for the persistence of blackface imagery as cultural themes and for other tactics seen as punishing religious minorities.

One of the most popular festivals for Belgian children is St. Nicholas Day, on Dec. 6, when the saint brings presents for all the good children and the bad ones are punished by his helper, a character called “Black Pete,” who wears blackface makeup.

The same tradition was followed in some parts of France and in the Netherlands, where it [has come under intense criticism](#), often being [abandoned or rethought](#). The practice has lingered in Belgium, a former colonial power in Africa.

This year, Belgium banned Muslim and Jewish ways of ritually slaughtering animals, part of a clash across Europe over the balance between animal welfare and religious freedom. Animal rights advocates and right-wing nationalists both pushed for the ban on ritual slaughter, but others said the new restrictions [amounted to bigotry under the guise of animal protection](#).

And also this year, Jews condemned a carnival in the city of Aalst, about 20 miles from Ghent, [where floats displayed gross caricatures of Orthodox Jews](#) with mice on their shoulders, sitting on bags of money.

Responding to the offensive sign language videos, Chief Rabbi





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Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, said: “We no longer live in an era where just because something was historically acceptable, it is still acceptable today.”

“With the rise of anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic stereotypes throughout Europe, as well as the specific challenges the Jewish community is facing regarding limiting religious practice in the Belgian regions of Flanders and Wallonia, racist imagery like the hooked nose only exacerbate prejudices.”

The Flemish Sign Language Center, which helped create the dictionary in 1999 and is responsible for updating its content, said in a statement that the dictionary included signs on a “descriptive” basis, based on the state of the Flemish sign language “as it is.”

“We don’t decide ourselves whether or not a sign has its place in the dictionary,” the statement said, adding that because sign languages are visual, they often refer to “certain stereotypical visual characteristics” of people.

The center said that the offensive Flemish signs were “not new,” but “originated much earlier” than 1999 and had become offensive only in recent years. Across Europe, the center noted, “Belgium” is often signed by a beer belly gesture, “China” by tugging the eyes and “Africa” by referring to skin color.

But in many dictionaries of sign languages around the world, including of American Sign Language in the United States, the sign for “Jewish” is simply a stroke under the chin.

Michael Freilich, a Jewish member of the Belgian federal Parliament for the conservative and separatist New Flemish Alliance party, said that universities should be on the forefront of





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fighting such symbols of bigotry in society, rather than excusing them.

“It’s more shocking that the university’s rector doesn’t empathize with the Jewish community and doesn’t understand the problem — that is a bigger issue than that it was published in the first place,” he said.

“Mistakes happen,” Mr. Freilich added, “but when you are shown that mistake, you would expect an apology, some movement. But when it comes to Belgium, these sensitivities are just not there.”

The controversy appears to have had some effect, however. The Flemish Sign Language Center said it would soon create a new dictionary that would attach value labels to certain signs. And by Friday, the label “negative connotation” had appeared under the videos depicting Jews using signs for pipe curls and hooked noses.

Follow Milan Schreuer on Twitter: [@MilanSchreuer](https://twitter.com/MilanSchreuer).

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/20/world/europe/belgium-sign-language-jews.html>





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the **algemeiner**

New European Parliament President Tells Rabbis He Will Protect Jewish Practices and Fight Antisemitism

 by Algemeiner Staff



Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, and Boris Mintz, chairman of the Board of Patrons, lead a delegation to meet David Sassoli, president of the European Parliament. Photo: Courtesy of the Conference of European Rabbis.

The new president of the European Parliament told a delegation of European rabbis and community leaders on Monday that he would protect Jewish practices and fight antisemitism.

Certain Jewish customs have been under considerable pressure in Europe, especially kosher slaughter and circumcision. Many outspoken activists consider kosher slaughter a form of animal abuse and circumcision a form of mutilation. There have been attempts to ban both practices in several European countries.





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The delegation, led by Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt of Moscow, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, was told by European Parliament President David Sassoli that he would continue to protect Jewish practices, as well as combat the rise of antisemitism on the continent.

Goldschmidt stated, "Our institutions are hundreds of years old. Our food preparation and circumcision practices are governed by our communities in accordance with EU regulation."

"These practices are for the sole benefit of our own communities and we are proud of our high standards," he added.

<https://www.algemeiner.com/2019/09/24/new-european-parliament-president-tells-rabbis-he-will-protect-jewish-practices-and-fight-antisemitism/>





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'EU Parliament committed to combating anti-Semitism'

European Parliament president meets leaders of Conference of European Rabbis, pledges to stop anti-Jewish legislation.

Contact Editor Arutz Sheva Staff, 24/09/19 18:07



European Parliament President meets Conference of European Rabbis
European Parliament President's spokesperson

European Parliament President David Sassoli met with a delegation from the Conference of European Presidents led by Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt.

Sassoli said at the meeting that "the policy of preserving Jewish religious rights and the stubborn and consistent war with every manifestation of anti-Semitism and racism will continue uncompromisingly."





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"I am concerned about the anti-religious and anti-Semitic legislation in Europe and especially its scope. The European Parliament is committed to the fight against anti-Semitism. Tolerance and religious freedom are an essential part of our EU. I will continue to cooperate with the heads of EU institutions and together join forces to fight anti-religious and anti-Semitic legislation. I will continue more vigorously in developing initiatives and in upgrading the successful cooperation of Parliament and EU institutions with the Conference of European Rabbis," Sassoli concluded.

Rabbi Goldschmidt told the European Parliament president that it was important to prevent the steps taken against Jews and Judaism across the continent.

"From our many years of acquaintance with both your position in the Italian Parliament and in the Italian media and in your role as President of the European Parliament, we have come to see a strong leader with a strong moral compass and clear vision. We have faith in the new era of leadership and the quality of friendship between the parliament you preside over and the Conference of European Rabbis. We hear all the time about the importance of the Jews and their status in Europe. We are delighted at your election and thank you for your consistent support for Jews and Israel and are confident that you are the person who intends to convert speech into actions," Rabbi Goldschmidt said.

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/269370>





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EU chief says Parliament will fight 'worrying rise of antisemitism in Europe'

'It's an honour to meet the representatives of the Conference of European Rabbis,' EU Parliament President tweeted after meeting delegation of rabbis

By MATHILDE FROT

September 25, 2019, 2:39 pm



A delegation of senior rabbis met David Sassoli, president of the European Parliament

The European parliament will fight the "worrying rise of antisemitism in Europe," the EU Parliament President David Sassoli has said.

After meeting senior rabbis and community leaders on Monday, Sassoli tweeted "our Parliament is committed to fight the worrying rise of antisemitism in Europe."

Sassoli met representatives from the Conference of European Rabbis (CER) in Brussels, a group of 700 religious leaders across Europe.





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The EU chief, who was elected as president in July, was presented with a silver sculpture of a *shofar*, the holy instrument used by Jews on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.



Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, head of CER, told the meeting: “Our institutions are hundreds of years old.

“Our food preparation and circumcision practices are governed by our communities in accordance with EU regulation. These practices are for the sole benefit of our own communities and we are proud of our high standards.

“It is vital to recognise that not every immigration into Europe is the same. We stand ready to work together with the EU to assist later immigration to create recognised institutions to govern their practices.”





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An EU report published in July found nearly half of young Jews living in Europe say they avoid wearing Jewish items in public due to concerns about their safety.

The report, based on a survey carried out last year across 12 EU member states, found that four in five of those polled say antisemitism has risen in their countries over the last five years.

<https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/eu-chief-says-parliament-will-fight-worrying-rise-of-antisemitism-in-europe/>





Publication: Jewish Weekly Online
Date: 25.09.19



Sassoli to fight anti-Semitism and extremism

25th September 2019 ● 7



Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt and Boris Mintz present a shofar to European Parliament president David Sassoli

SENIOR RABBIS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS FROM AROUND EUROPE MET NEW EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT PRESIDENT DAVID SASSOLI IN BRUSSELS EARLIER THIS WEEK.

CHIEF RABBI PINCHAS GOLDSCHMIDT LED THE DELEGATION WHO CONFIRMED EUROPE'S JEWISH COMMUNITIES ARE FULLY INTEGRATED AS EUROPEAN CITIZENS.

"Our institutions are hundreds of years old", said Rabbi Goldschmidt, Conference of European Rabbis president. "Our food preparation and circumcision practices are governed by our communities in accordance with EU regulation. These practices are for the sole benefit of our own communities and we are proud of our high standards." He added, "It is vital to recognise that not every immigration into Europe is the same. We stand ready to work together with the EU to assist later immigrations to create recognised institutions to govern their practices."

President Sassoli welcomed the sentiments and also restated his commitment to provide EU protections against anti-Semitism and extremism.

CER Board of Patrons Boris Mintz added presented the president with a silver sculpture of a shofar, asking that the Jewish voice be heard in Europe.

CER is the primary rabbinical alliance in Europe uniting 700 religious leaders of synagogue communities.

The conference maintains and defends religious rights of Jews in Europe.

<https://thejewishweekly.com/sassoli-to-fight-anti-semitism-and-extremism/>



Publication: Jewish Weekly
Date: 26.09.19

Sassoli to fight anti-Semitism and extremism

BY HOWARD LAWRENCE

Senior rabbis and community leaders from around Europe met new European Parliament President David Sassoli in Brussels earlier this week.

Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt led the delegation who confirmed Europe's Jewish communities are fully integrated as European citizens.

"Our institutions are hundreds of years old", said Rabbi Goldschmidt, Conference of European Rabbis president. "Our food preparation and circumcision practices are governed by our communities in accordance with EU regulation. These practices are for the sole benefit of our own communities and we are proud of our high standards."

He added, "It is vital to recognise that not every immigration into Europe is the same. We stand ready to work together with the EU to assist later immigrations to create recognised institutions to govern their practices."

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Boris Mints presents a silver sculpture of a shofar to David Sassoli

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Jewish and Muslim leaders meet to protect religious freedom

Josh Samuels

Jewish and Muslim leaders from fifteen European countries gathered in Matera, southern Italy to attend a Muslim Jewish Leadership Council event focusing on the dialogue and partnership between the two communities.

The Conference of European Rabbis (CER) sent a ten-strong delegation led by Rabbi Lody van der Kamp of the Netherlands, together with rabbis from the UK, France, Switzerland, Germany, Italy and Sweden.

Shimon Cohen, Shechita UK's Campaign Director, who also serves as an adviser to the CER, was invited to join the Council to lead discussions on Shechita and Milah issues. Cohen also represents the Union of Mohelim of Europe.

Whilst recognising shared concerns, Mr Cohen urged participants to follow the Jewish community's lead and to improve training and seek regulation for practitioners in both circumcision and the religious slaughter of animals for food. 'Recognising our differences can help us help each other,' Cohen said.

During the intensive three-day meeting, during which time the rabbis, muftis and imams walked the ancient narrow streets of Matera, the Muslim Jewish Leadership



L-R: Imam Sheikh Mohammad Ismail, DL of Sheffield University; Shimon Cohen, Shechita UK; Prof. Muhammad Abu-Nimer, Muslim Jewish Leadership Council.

Council resolved to:

1. Produce background documents detailing the links between Muslim and Jewish faiths in matters of common concern, which should provide a basis for collaboration and advocacy for policy change where appropriate and necessary;
2. Form two commissions on kosher/

halal and religious freedoms, consisting of members with expertise in these fields, who can offer advice, review data and produce communications on emerging issues;
3. Conduct outreach to European institutions and seek opportunities to collaborate to protect European religious minorities.

