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1/2

Belgian Carnival Goes Ahead With Anti-Semitic Displays Despite Protests

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A float with an effigy of a Jew is seen during a carnival parade in Aalst, Belgium, Sunday. (Reuters/Yves Herman)

AALST, Belgium (Reuters) - A satirical Belgian carnival parade decried by Israel's foreign minister as "hateful" went ahead on Sunday despite being withdrawn from the United Nation's list of recognized cultural events over accusations of racism and anti-Semitism.

After a float in 2019 featured caricatures of religious Jews standing with bags of money, organizers in the city of Aalst faced calls to cancel the centuries-old parade, which was included on UNESCO's cultural heritage list in 2010.

Israel's Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz said on Twitter on Thursday: "Belgium as a Western democracy should be ashamed to allow such a vitriolic anti-Semitic display," calling on authorities to ban "this hateful parade."



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2/2

Organizers and participants claimed that the Aalst carnival, which pokes fun at religious, ethnic and social groups, including the British and Belgian royal families, was not against Jews.

“Nobody is targeted,” said 21-year-old student Jielke, one of thousands of revelers who turned out despite a winter storm.

“Last year there was a lot of fuss, but we want to make fun of everyone,” she said, standing in front of a float with an effigy of an Arab man as a snake charmer.

UNESCO noted the carnival’s “slightly subversive atmosphere” when including it in its list of “Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity” in 2010, according to its website. It removed it in December 2019, after a request by Belgium and the city of Aalst, which had expected to be taken off the list.

Of some 60 floats, a handful made fun of religion, including one effigy of a religious Jew with boxes of diamonds. Another was as a mock-up of the Kosel.

A Reuters witness saw one group of men wearing the so-called Rabbi kit of oversized noses, side locks and black hats.

“You can have fun with everybody, but there’s a limit,” said Philippe Markiewicz, president of the Israelite Consistory of Belgium, the official representative of Jews in the country.

“My city is neither racist nor anti-Semitic,” Aalst Mayor Christophe D’Haese told a news conference.

<https://hamodia.com/2020/02/23/belgian-carnival-goes-ahead-anti-semitic-displays-despite-protests/>



Figures caricaturing Orthodox Jews are pictured on a chariot ahead of the parade in Aalst, Sunday. (Nicolas Maeterlinck/Belga/AFP via Getty Images)

