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The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry publishes commentary and analysis on Jewish identity and culture. You are welcome to share your thoughts on our Perspectives with us: cst@tauex.tau.ac.il. We are glad to share with you the twenty-ninth issue of Perspectives.

Head Held High

**I am wearing my Magen David on the streets of Warsaw. Here is
what happens**

Aleksandra Gliszczynska-Grabias

In the final lines of *The Plague*, Albert Camus writes of its protagonist, Dr Rieux: “None the less, he knew that the tale he had to tell could not be one of a final victory. It could only be the record of what had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again in the never ending fight against terror and its relentless onslaughts, despite their personal afflictions, by all who, while unable to be saints but refusing to bow down to pestilences, strive their utmost to be healers.”

One would have thought that, in the face of the unprecedented antisemitic slaughter and pogrom against the civilian Jewish population perpetrated by the Palestinian Hamas on October 7, 2023, the entire democratic-liberal world would stand shoulder to shoulder with the victims, assuming the roles of these Camusian “healers.”

The opposite has happened.

A wave of genocidal antisemitism has flooded the world with shouts – in defiance of the law – of “Slaughter the Jews” heard in the streets of European capitals.

In one shocking event, at a Canadian university, a lecturer shouted at Jewish students handing out posters with pictures of those kidnapped by the murderous Hamas: “Go back to Poland, sharmuta” (whore in Arabic).

By attacking those standing up for the kidnapped, he was not defending the rights of Palestinians. Rather, he was outright praising anti-Jewish pogroms.

He knew, as did millions around the world, that now, at last, it was no longer possible, no longer necessary, to pretend to criticize the state of Israel in a civilized, legitimate, and entirely acceptable way.

Paradoxically, however, his call may make sense: these Jewish students would be today much safer in Warsaw than in Montreal.

There are disturbing incidents in Warsaw, too: a journalist and a radio station allowed antisemitic, denialist content about the events of October 7 to be preached on air; some in the liberal left-wing “elites” called Israel’s defensive actions “unacceptable” or “genocidal.”

However, none of these examples are comparable to what we observe in Western European countries, the US, and Canada – to say nothing of most Arab and Muslim countries.

One case is worth discussing in particular.

On October 21, a march protesting Israel’s military invasion of Gaza passed through the streets of Warsaw. The demonstrators carried Palestinian flags and banners with slogans, including “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

A banner with the words “Keep the world clean” pictured a trashcan with a symbolic Israeli flag inside. It caused particular outrage.

This banner was held and displayed in public by Marie Andersen, a Norwegian student at the Warsaw Medical University.

Its content and symbolism provoked international outrage and was unequivocally classified as a manifestation of antisemitism. This was confirmed by, among others, the President of Poland, the Mayor of Warsaw, as well as experts and organizations engaged in countering antisemitism.

During the march, the Nexta news service interviewed Andersen.

Her fundamental refusal to name and condemn the crimes committed by Hamas terrorists and her denial of the right of Jews to live in Israel and of the right of Israel to exist within its borders proved her actions to have purely antisemitic overtones.

What is more, she also posted on her Instagram a poster directly equating the state of Israel with the Nazi regime. This is classified as a form of antisemitism according to the Working Definition of Antisemitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

The Working Definition states that antisemitism can be manifested, among other instances, by depriving Jews of their right to self-determination and applying double standards by requiring Israel to behave in a way that is not expected or required of any other democratic state.

Various Polish and international NGOs, including the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists, submitted formal notifications to the Polish Prosecutor Office in Warsaw, requesting the opening of an investigation into the possible commission of the crime by Andersen.

They claim that Andersen has breached Article 126a of the Polish Criminal Code, which penalizes public incitement to commit a crime (genocide, participation in mass murder, discrimination) and praising it, as well as Article 256 para. 1 of the Polish Criminal Code, penalizing public incitement to hatred based on nationality and ethnicity.

They also called on the Rector of the Medical University of Warsaw to expel Andersen from the university, using all available disciplinary measures against her antisemitic behavior and, by doing so, protecting the rights and freedoms of other medical students, including Jewish and Israeli students.

All these proceedings are ongoing and are monitored closely. The reaction of the Polish state, represented here by the public prosecutor and public university, is of utmost importance for defining the attitude of Poland towards antisemitic hatred.

The problem of antisemitism in Poland is not marginal.

I have spoken about its various forms many times, both in the media and in academic literature.

However, it has an entirely different dimension from its genocidal variety, which today is becoming a common form of exercising “freedom of expression” by mobs demanding the annihilation of the Jewish people in the name of “protecting the human rights” of the Palestinian people.

Today, European countries, including those of central and eastern Europe, are faced with a considerable challenge and a test that will show whether the efforts made over the years to counter antisemitism were meaningful and carried out in a way that will defend Jews from hatred and violence.

On the streets of Warsaw, I wear my Magen David on my coat with my head held high.

This is no longer safe on the streets of Paris, Brussels, or Amsterdam.

The reasons why I feel safe in Poland to express in public my position on the crimes committed by Hamas are complex and multifold, with one being perhaps of particular importance.

Poland's contemporary left has been formed in different ideological and historical contexts than its Western European counterparts.

At the same time, the European post-colonial discourse that has, in some of its manifestations, shifted and adopted narratives accusing Israel of being a colonial state, is absent in Poland, a state that has no colonial past.

Polish state and society can also be described as, to a large extent, pro-American and allied with the US.

In today's reality of the inversion of basic concepts such as perpetrator and victim, effect and cause, good and evil, every oasis of normality and honesty is worth its weight in gold.

This is what I consider Poland to be today.

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