

SEMINAR

Europe against anti-Semitism for a Union of Diversity

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Thank you President for this great initiative. I am a little less grateful to you for giving me the floor straight after Elie Wiesel our great teacher !

Dear Rabbis, leaders of Europe, Jewish leaders: it is very important that we are all here today.

As Elie Wiesel said, we all speak of the same thing, but everybody has his own style. I will start from the fact that 30 year ago I was a soviet dissident. I was among other things responsible for the monitoring of anti-Semitic policy in the Soviet Union, for collecting information about anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, for typing it up and for sending it abroad, to USA and to the leaders of Western Europe, and to have it published there. Because we knew these are our allies. Our success would depend on the fact that Western Europe would know the truth about anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. There was no doubt for us that the reason why anti-Semitism existed in the Soviet Union, was because the Soviet Union was a totalitarian society. It was also obvious for us that after the holocaust the free world would never, but never, permit the return of anti-Semitism.

Thirty years later I have practically the same job: in the Israeli government I am responsible among other things for monitoring the phenomena of anti-Semitism, for collecting the files, and for publishing them. And now, because it is all public, all open, I do not have in secret to send it to the ambassadors in Moscow. I can simply invite the ambassadors from those countries which are mentioned so often in those reports, and to discuss with them why it is so. The biggest disappointment of this is that the ambassadors who get invited are not the ambassadors of the countries which

are newly released from communism, and where the institutions of democracy and human rights are not yet developed. They are unfortunately the ambassadors of the leading European countries, because it is in Europe today that there are so many incidents and acts of violence, such as destruction of cemeteries and synagogues. And as it has been said, when synagogues are attacked, Jews are attacked. During the discussions very often a question is raised, why does this happen? We hear the response: "Do you really believe that there is anti-Semitism in Europe? Look, yes it is true that there are awful accidents and episodes of anti-Semitic violence. Usually it comes from some extreme elements or those who came from the Middle East, and it is only natural that there are sensitivities in the middle east and every day they see on TV these awful pictures of Israeli soldiers up against Palestinian kids. Of course we have to cope with this, but you cannot accuse Europe of anti-Semitism". And then very often we are told: "Do not try to stop legitimate criticism of Israel by calling it anti-Semitism".

This statement is very important, it is crucial to make clear distinction between criticising Israel and anti-Semitism, because of course we are for legitimate criticism of Israel. The politician in Israel who stops for one day to criticise the government has no political future in Israel. Unfortunately Israel is the only democracy in that part of the world which is true to the principles of democracy and human rights and it cannot survive, cannot act if it is not obsessive about it. But where is the fine dividing line between this legitimate criticism, and anti-Semitism? Of course we can disagree about many things, we can debate amongst ourselves and with the whole world about defence, the line of the fence, about settlements, the right way to cope with terror; we can agree and we can disagree, but where is the fine line between legitimate criticism and anti-Semitism? I propose a test on three criteria: Demonisation, double standards, and de-legitimation.

Demonisation: the main tool of anti-Semites for thousands of years was to demonise you. Recently they show a clip of the latest film with classical anti-Semitism: how Jews are cutting throats and things like this. Such classical anti-Semitism is amplified by modern technology so that in five minutes it can reach millions and millions or hundreds of millions of people, including Europe, and to bring them back to this

classical anti-Semitism. There was no discussion, no debate at any moment, nobody had any doubt about its legitimacy or illegitimacy. This is anti-Semitism which presents Jews as absolutely evil. Jean-Paul Sartre said that the anti-Semite has no logical inspiration, for him is clear that Jew is something next to evil; but when under the pretext of legitimate criticism Israel is mentioned every day as not being a State, and Sharon as Hitler, and refugee camps as Auschwitz, this is the same type of demonisation of the Jews, through the Jewish State. Refugee camps are a very tough place and of course it is legitimate to ask ourselves, every day, how the fourth generation of Palestinians live in refugee camps, and why they are not dismantled. We can have debates and maybe disagreements between us here, but the one who is comparing (and we are talking about the leaders of West Europe), the one who is comparing Auschwitz with the refugee camps, either does not know what Auschwitz is, or else they know it very well but they want to remind the people again and again that there is one evil in this world, one State which is as close to evil as possible, and it is the State of Israel, which is creating a new Auschwitz. This is demonisation under the pretext of legitimate criticism of Israel. It is the new anti-Semitism and it goes exactly in the same direction as classical anti-Semitism.

The second test we shall mention is the double standard. Again it was typical classical tool of anti-Semites for hundreds of years, to have double standards. In Soviet Russia there were more than one thousand laws against Jews. Jews had different rights in the Soviet Army, to go to University, and to protest. Of course in the Middle Ages in Europe you have many countries like this. In the 20th century it was Germany. Today it should become impossible to have official double standards towards the Jews. But it is possible to have double standards towards the Jewish State. The Red Cross, one of the most fine and wonderful organisations, is the result of human principles in Western Europe, with very close cooperation in more than 100 countries. But the magenta Star of David (Magen David) is not permitted to be a full member, again and again, which shows the anti-Semitism of different countries: The Red Cross is OK, the Red Crescent is OK, but the Magen David cannot be a full member because of their sensitivities. I can find many logical explanations. I read very interesting explanations of Russian Ministers, very logical ones, of why, because of the sensitivities, Jews

cannot be accepted into the University of S. Petersburg in the same way as non-Jews. The Geneva Convention, another very important instrument, was created in Europe in the wake of the Second World War, because it was clear that after the experience in Germany and Japan you cannot be indifferent to the way prisoners are treated, and how the populations of occupied territories are treated. 150 countries became the members of the Geneva Convention. I have to call to mind the terrible things happened in the last 50 years in Cambodia, in Rhodesia, in Rwanda, in Europe, everywhere. The double standard is that, of all the countries which were condemned under the Geneva Convention in the last 53 years on the basis of consensus, it is Israel who has to start explaining the difference of treatment of prisoners of war in Israel and Syria, for example. And at the Committee of Human Rights of United Nations, regularly, year after year, 35% of all the condemnations are about human rights in Israel. More than the violations of human rights of all the dictators together ! That is a double standard. And a double standard was for years seen through practices in the Soviet Union and was always the base, the legitimization, of hatred of the Jews. Since even the States applied different laws towards the Jews, just because Jews are different, they can be hated. Double standards applied to the Jewish State is one of the things which supported anti-Semitism.

The third test is in the denial of the legitimacy of the Jewish State. Who in Europe denied the legitimacy of the State of Israel ? It is what we have been hearing for the last two years more and more in books, in university discussions, from some of the leading intellectuals in France and in England, and in other places, where Israel is presented as the last anachronism of the time of colonialism. In the 1800's many countries from Europe had colonies, and they all came back out again. The only people who did not come back are the Jews. They forgot to come back to Europe. They are still a colony. Or in Russia: officially there is no justification for cultural anti-Semitism. Officially though it was said that the Jews are not a nation; and this was enough to persecute all the Jewish culture and other institutions. The moment we accept in any way that Jewish State is a little bit less legitimate than another State, we already give a lot of support to those who are against the Jewish people and against those who associate themselves with Israel.

Some of you will have seen 3D movies last year (not popular), but when I was young they were popular, and when you watch without special glasses you see nothing, everything is flat. But the moment you put on the 3D glasses, immediately there is a big effect. Suddenly you see the picture. Jews are for legitimate criticism of Israel, so let's put on the 3D glasses and watch: Demonisation, double standard, and de-legitimisation.

So what can be done ? We have to recognise what is done, and no doubt in little more than one year I will be dealing with this. A lot is done in Europe and we highly appreciate the initiatives and personal commitment of President Chirac, and the Prime Minister of France, and the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joschka Fischer, or the Prime Minister of Sweden, the Prime Minister of Italy, and many other political authorities. And of course the initiative of President Prodi is the best proof of how Europe today is aware of this problem. I think that coordination with the private initiatives of the countries is very important. A united European policy, and the wonderful initiative by President Prodi, if there is already such a policy, would make the European Commission a good place to coordinate this. When we are talking about enforcing legislation or about education or diplomatic relations, I do believe that it is very important for those countries who became the origin today of this classical anti-Semitism. When they are talking about sermons in Saudi Arabia, or about books which are published in Egypt, or textbooks elsewhere, or films like the Syrian one, a lot of money has been put in by the State to produce these awful anti-Semitic propaganda . So all the relations of the free World have to be linked to this process.

You know, once Karl Marx said that history repeats itself twice. The first time it is a tragedy, and the second time it is a farce. As in many other things he was wrong: there are two tragedies. In many cases unfortunately the tragedies which happened once in History do repeat themselves. And we Jews and Europeans who live in History, live through History, and live with History, who know the power of History so well, who know that History can repeat itself as a tragedy, are to recognize the evil and to fight the evil. For this we need more clarity and courage: more of clarity to see the evil, and more of courage to defeat it. Thank you.