

**EUROPE**

**VIEWPOINT ■**

# The Enemy Within

**BY JOSEF JOFFE**

"Is Europe anti-Semitic?" In Washington or New York, this question is invariably sprung on the unwary visitor once the standard conversation openers have been checked off—such as, "Will NATO help us in Phase II against Saddam?"

It is a deceptively simple question because anti-Semitism has appeared in so many guises throughout European history. Is it still the religious kind that has tainted the Jews as "Christ killers?" That is gone—thanks to the Catholic Church's excision of all vestiges of anti-Judaism from its liturgy. Is it exclusionist anti-Semitism that would bar Jews from the professions? No, just look at the many Jews in top positions throughout the economy today, as well as in the media and in academia. Is it social discrimination? If so, it would be no more virulent than in the U.S., where a (dwindling) number of country clubs still exclude Jews. Is it "eliminationist anti-Semitism" as in medieval England, 16th century Spain or 20th century Germany? No.

So what is it? If the "A word" is at all justified, it would designate a novel phenomenon. Let's call it "neo-anti-Semitism," a disease that resembles athlete's foot. The ailment is smelly and painful, and it keeps coming back. But it is not life-threatening.

Why now? The trigger, but not the cause, is the war between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Or as the *Süd-deutsche Zeitung*, a liberal German daily, has put it: "If Sharon did not exist, he would have to be invented." Europe, certainly its chattering and political classes, has chosen sides in an almost subconscious way. With the exception of Berlin, as represented by Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, the E.U. tends to interpret "evenhandedness" as "pro-Palestinian neutrality." A goodly part of the media has

decided that the Israeli occupation is the greater evil, that Palestinian terrorism is somehow "understandable" and that Israeli counterthrusts are invariably "excessive" and "murderous." If Ariel Sharon is the "Butcher of Beirut," Yasser Arafat's terrorist career since 1964 barely rates a mention.

Why the slant? Some motives are honorable. Europe, historically the fountainhead of imperialism, is now beholden to a solid anticolonialist consensus. Hence there is an automatic quantum of sympathy for those who resist foreign rule. An additional measure derives from the David-and-Goliath effect, with Israel cast in the role of the armored giant out to crush the Palestinian David.

But then you might ask: Why not a similar quantum of solace for the Tibetans, the Chechens, the Iraqi Kurds, indeed, for all other oppressed nationalities around the world? The answer trails off into Freudian speculation. Some wag once put it thus: "The Germans will never forgive the Jews for Auschwitz," meaning: they don't want to live under the eternal moral burden of the Holocaust.

The quip may be generalized. Though the Nazis inflicted the machinery of death on the Jews, many occupied Europeans lent a helping hand in the roundup or failed to protect their Jewish compatriots. To relieve that moral burden, it helps to depict the Israelis as the Middle Eastern heirs to the Nazis and to project guilt onto the grandchildren of the victims.

Add the realities of contemporary European politics. Anti-Semitic violence has been most rampant in France, a country that also harbors the largest Muslim minority in Europe. Most of the incidents have been perpetrated by French Arabs—by those, often from the deracinated underclass of the banlieues, who have chosen to act out their

rage against Israel and the Jews on European soil.

Nonetheless, the A word obscures the real problem. Europe today suffers from a much larger ailment, as evidenced by the growth of right-wing populism in France, the Netherlands, Denmark or Austria. The common denominator is not Jews; it is angst and anger.

The targets are foreigners who are darkskinned and non-Christian. Another bugaboo is "Brussels," shorthand for the loss of national identity and the imposition of integration from above. The main enemy is simply change, as driven by impersonal market forces no longer contained by national borders.

That story, though, seems to have a more or less happy ending—for the time being. Twenty percent of the vote is the best the new Pied Pipers like Le Pen can do. Or take the case of Germany's Jürgen Möllemann, who is vice chairman of the smallish Free Democratic Party (FDP). Hoping to tap into the reservoir of 2.5 million Muslims in Germany, he deliberately played with anti-Semitic fire—and got burned. With the German media in an uproar, his party forced Möllemann into apologizing to the German Jewish leadership.

Is Europe anti-Semitic? When all the evidence is tallied, the answer must be no. Europe is unhappy about many things, from permanent unemployment to seemingly unstoppable immigration. But above all, Europe is relentlessly resistant to change. It dislikes the liberalization of labor markets as much as political risk taking, pace Jörg Haider of Austria and Jürgen Möllemann of Germany.

The bet is on centrism—sluggish, boring and reliable, to be sure. But that's not bad for a Continent that has given us the two bloodiest scourges of the 20th century, fascism and communism. ■

JEROME DELAY—AP

**What appears to be anti-Semitism is often old-fashioned nationalism, as shown by Le Pen supporters**