

Parliament must act urgently against Islamophobia and anti-Semitism

Written by Claire Fernandez on 25 February 2015 in Opinion
Opinion

As recent events have led to a rise in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in Europe, new measures are required to address both of these forms of racism, writes Claire Fernandez.



The deadly attacks against Jews in Paris and Copenhagen, as well as the numerous attacks against Muslims in France, Sweden and Germany have added to the fear experienced by many Jews and Muslims across Europe.

While anti-Semitism and Islamophobia each have their specificities and different historical sources, they can sometimes be quite similar.

The European parliament must take steps to specifically address both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and not fall into the trap of division.

Research by the [EU fundamental rights agency \(FRA\)](#) [1] shows worrying trends when it comes to Jews

experiencing discrimination as well as a fear of verbal or physical attacks, particularly in France, Belgium and Hungary.

The Paris and Copenhagen attacks have added to the ongoing fears of European Jews, and many Jewish institutions have been under increasing military or police protection.

"In a context of growing mistrust, ongoing accusations, sometimes hatred and violence, fuelled by international developments, it is crucial to bring Jewish and Muslim communities together and build solidarity"

Last week, hundreds of Jewish graves were desecrated in a cemetery near Strasbourg, France, followed by the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in Oldenburg, Germany. The community security trust in the UK has reported the highest number of anti-Semitic incidents in 2014 ever reported.

Similarly, [an FRA survey](#) [2] has provided evidence of discrimination and stigmatisation of Muslims. Since the Paris attacks, anti-Muslim sentiments and incidents are on the rise in Europe, and Muslim communities fear retaliation.

From 7 January 2015 to 7 February 2015, there were 153 Islamophobic incidents against individuals and places of worship in France - a 70 per cent increase compared to the previous year. Islamophobic incidents have also occurred recently in other EU countries, including Sweden and Germany.

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia target people based on their real or perceived Jewish or Muslim background, rather than a rejection of 'religion' or their representatives. Parliament should maintain a fundamental rights perspective, focusing on racial and religious discrimination, as well as its intersections with gender, age and social origin, rather than on 'religious intolerance'.

In a number of cases, restrictive policies towards Muslim communities have also affected Jewish communities, for example in the case of forbidding slaughtering and circumcision.

Surveys have shown that an 'old' type of far-right anti-Semitism is still largely dominant, and goes hand in hand with other forms of prejudice, including Islamophobia.

Many far-right and populist right movements and parties which are openly Islamophobic are built around an anti-Semitic basis. Common strategies for action to counter these forces are needed, in a collective and constructive way.

In this respect, existing EU laws, including equality and hate crime legislation, must be better enforced in order to combat anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. The proposed equal treatment directive - blocked in the council since 2008 - should also be adopted, so as to fill gaps in protection against discrimination, in particular on grounds of religion and belief outside of employment. In addition, these should be reinforced by specific policy strategies to address anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

In a context of growing mistrust, ongoing accusations, sometimes hatred and violence, fuelled by international developments, it is crucial to bring Jewish and Muslim communities together and build solidarity.

Measures to prevent acts of hatred towards Jews and Muslims should not stigmatise or polarise any community, and must include support to cross-community and community-led initiatives. Symbolic initiatives such as the common peace vigil in Oslo, showing cross-community support, should be encouraged.

About the author

Claire Fernandez is deputy director of the European network against racism (ENAR)

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