

Anti-Semitism is like rain

Translated by Iris Dan

23/10/2023

For the first 20 something years of my life, between 1944 and 1965, I lived in Constanța, where, except for some inappropriate "jokes" and some intentionally grotesque intonations I heard from some people when they learned that I was Jewish, I did not personally experience anti-Semitism. "That," friends would later tell me, "was due to the city's unique demographic pattern." At that time, Constanța was home to a multitude of ethnic groups: Romanians, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Turks, Tatars, Aromanians, Albanians, etc. Precisely because there were so many groups, friends said, in Constanța reigned a relative ethnic harmony that you wouldn't find in other cities in the country. I had even come to believe that an intelligent person (as I then simplistically defined intelligence) could not be racist. But I got over it pretty quickly as I learned more and more about history.

Then, for my entire life, I had discussions with Jewish and non-Jewish friends on the subject of anti-Semitism. These often ended up in very heated exchanges, with me invariably being accused of refusing to see reality. "You would even made every effort to understand Hitler," a friend said to me once in exasperation. And when I argued that a certain apparently anti-Semitic manifestation could only be a proof of stupidity, benightedness, or lack of information, the late Victor Eskenasy (former editor of the BBC and Free Europe) quoted to me the American saying: "if it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck and walks like a duck, it's definitely a duck".

Eventually I came to agree with them. The last possible doubts I might have had were dispelled by a recent article written against the backdrop of anti-Semitic demonstrations and attacks in London and other cities around the world. I quote from memory: "Why don't Russians in England suffer when Russia bombs civilians in Ukraine?" asks the author, Douglas Murray. He continues: "Why don't Muslims in England suffer when Islamists kill Christians in Africa? And why, when Israel retaliates to the provocations of its enemies, do Jews in England, even those who disagree with Israeli government policy, have to suffer from anti-Semitic attacks and amnesty?"



If, until October 7, any person of good faith could still have had any doubts as to anti-Semitism, the way Israel is treated by much of the media, the rage of anti-Israel protesters who never seem to have heard of the human rights situation in China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, some Arab countries, etc., the comments by "impartial" people that "of course Israel has a right and a duty to defend itself, but...." and here follow the objections implicitly dismissing that right and duty, well, all this leads to a single conclusion, namely that anti-Semitism is alive and kicking, despite the countless chants of "never again".

In fact, I had begun to see the situation in a different light a few years ago. I regularly discuss the subject with my friend and

former BBC colleague Petru Clej, who is, if I may say so, waging a real crusade against anti-Semitism. One day I told him that I admired what he was doing but that it was pointless.



"Anti-Semitism is like rain. It has become almost a natural phenomenon that cannot be avoided," I told him. "And what would you like? That nobody should do a thing?" he retorted indignantly, and rightly so. "Not at all," I replied. "I know that anti-Semitism must continue to be fought. After all, hope dies last, right? It's just that, personally, I'm very skeptical that these efforts have any effect."

In Joseph Heller's book *Catch 22*, there is an episode in which a soldier, brought before a military tribunal, asks the main character, Yossarian (quoting from memory), "What do you think they're going to do to me?" "They'll convict you, for sure. They don't like Jews." "But I'm not Jewish," the comrade replies. "It doesn't matter," Yossarian continues. "They don't like anyone!"

Mutatis mutandis, the October 7 massacre in Israel could contain a warning to the Western world; that jihadists don't like anyone, not just Jews. As can regularly be seen in London, Paris, Amsterdam, in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, etc., etc., etc.

And what can Israelis do in face of this worldwide wave of disapproval and

resurgence of anti-Semitism? In my opinion, they have been, for years and years now, in the most unenviable situation possible: damned if they do, damned if they don't. And they know it. And that is why I suspect many have adopted, in recent days, the words of their former prime minister, Golda Meir (free translation): *If we had the choice between being dead with the pity of the world and living with an unfavorable image, we would choose to live with the unfavorable image.*



By Dorian Galbinski 22/10/2023

P.S. And in response to some possible comments, I would like to state the following:

- My heart bleeds for every civilian: child, man or woman in Gaza killed by Israeli bombing.

And, yes,

- I am categorically against the Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

- I do not believe that a democracy can survive while keeping another people under occupation, and

- I am in favor of an independent Palestinian state.

But all these pertain to another subject.