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## 'Kauft nicht bei Juden' will worsen the conflict

By DENIS MACSHANE

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**The call to boycott Jewish commerce is Europe's oldest political appeal .**

Kauft nicht bei Juden – “Don't buy from Jews” – is back. The call to boycott Jewish commerce is Europe's oldest political appeal. Once again, as the tsunami of hate against Israel rolls out from the Right and the Left, from Islamist ideologues to Europe's cultural elites, the demand is to punish the Jews. That the actions of the Israeli government are open to criticism is a fact. But what are the real arguments ?

Firstly, that Israel is wrong to defy international law as an occupying force on the West Bank. But what about Turkey? It has 35,000 soldiers occupying the territory of a sovereign republic – Cyprus. Ankara has sent hundreds of thousands of settlers to colonize the ancient Greekowned lands of northern Cyprus. Turkey has been told again and again by the UN to withdraw its troops. Instead, it now also stands accused of destroying the ancient Christian churches of northern Cyprus.

Does anyone call for a boycott of Turkey, or urge companies to divest from it? No. Only the Jews are targeted.

Or take India; 500,000 Indian soldiers occupy Kashmir. According to Amnesty International, 70,000 Muslims have been killed over the past 20 years by these soldiers and security forces – a number that far exceeds the Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in the same period. But the Islamic ideologues focus on Jews, not Indians.

May we talk of the western Sahara and Morocco, or Algeria's closure of the border there, making life far worse than that of Palestinians in Ramallah or Hebron? No, better not.

Voltaire – anti-Semite that he was – should be alive today to mock the hypocrisy of the new high priests calling anathema on the heads of Jews in Israel.

Second, the desire for peace in the Middle East is a global priority. But peace requires recognition of the Jewish state of Israel. There are 40 member states of the UN which have the words "Muslim" or "Islamic" in their names. No one challenges their right to exist or defend themselves.

Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza. Its reward was to have the territory turned into a new launch pad for rockets intended to kill Jews.

More rockets have been fired at Israel from Gaza than V1 or V2 rockets at London in 1944. No one blamed Winston Churchill for responding with all the force he could, as cities like Hamburg or Dresden faced the wrath of the RAF. But if Israel takes the slightest action against the Jew-killers of Hamas, all the hate of the world falls on its head.

Third, it is hard to see how peace can be made with an Israel that so many seek to brand an "apartheid state".

I worked in the 1980s with the black trade union movement inside South Africa. We lay in ditches as the apartheid police patrolled townships hunting for political activists. I could not swim at the same beach as my wife, a French-Vietnamese,

because of the racist laws. Muslims and Jews swim off the same Tel Aviv beaches. They can stay in the same hotels, be elected to the same parliament, and appeal to an independent judiciary for justice.

BY DEFINITION, an apartheid state has no right to exist. It cannot be a member of the UN. The campaign to call Israel an apartheid state is a campaign to make it a non-state. How can peace be made with a state whose opponents say should not exist ?

In Britain, there are calls by journalists and professors to boycott the Israeli media or universities. But Israeli writers, journalists and professors are the main opponents of the counterproductive policies of their government. To boycott them is to hand even more power to the haredi and Russian nationalists who now control Right-wing politics in Israel.

By any standard, the attacks on media freedom, on women, on gays or on lawyers is 1,000 times worse in Iran or Saudi Arabia. There is no democracy in Syria or Libya, limited democracy in Jordan, and open anti-Semitism displayed by the Muslim Brotherhood movements in the Arab world. Is there any call to boycott these states, their journalists or professors? No. The call – rightly – is for engagement, contacts, debate and discussion. Many even argue for talks with Hamas, although its charter, with its strident anti-Semitic language, could have been written by a Nazi.

But talks with Jewish politicians, lawyers or intellectuals must be boycotted. This policy of making the Jewish citizens of Israel into objects of global hatred will only make the Middle East crisis worse. If it was directed evenly at all states which occupy and oppress territories, it might have some basis in morality. If the boycott, disinvestment and sanctions movement also called for sanctions against the new anti-Semitism of the extreme Right in Europe, it might make sense. The openly anti-Semitic Jobbik Party in Hungary parades in its fascist uniforms. Anti-Semitic politicians are elected to the European Parliament. The German politician Thilo Sarrazin can describe Jews as having “different genes” from other people. And now Europeans, of all people, once again cry *Kauft nicht bei Juden*.

Those who dislike Israeli rightwing policies must find other language than that of classical anti-Semitism. I am not Jewish. As a British MP, I work with thousands of

Muslims in my constituency. I am more often in mosques than in churches. I am proud of my Muslim friends who are MPs, peers, municipal councillors or prominent as journalists, lawyers, doctors and intellectuals. The 20 million European Muslims face new hates which must be combated. But there is no profit for them in joining the hate campaigns against Jews in Israel.

As Europeans we must reject the old language of boycott and economic campaigns against Jews. Israel, Palestine and Europe must all have a 21st century future, and not return to the hates of the past.

The writer, a former British Labor MP, also served as minister of state for Europe. He is the author of *Globalizing Hatred: The New Anti-Semitism!* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson.)