

What is considered extremist in today's Germany?

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Recent events demonstrate the relationship of German political culture today to anti-Semitism. On the one hand, one is not allowed to deny the Holocaust, as Catholic Bishop Richard Williamson found out. Chancellor Angela Merkel herself told the German pope in the Vatican that such an anti-Semite, member of the reactionary Pius X Brotherhood, could not be tolerated. Just a few days later, Iranian government spokesman Gholam Hossein Elham called the Holocaust "a big lie to settle a rootless regime in the heart of the Islamic world."

That weekend, moreover, Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani was invited to join the International Security Conference in Munich, where he said on Friday there were "different views of the Holocaust. I will say: It did not happen." Was there any outrage in the case of the Iranians as there was in that of Bishop Williamson? German journalist Malte Lehming of the daily *Tagesspiegel* explained that Holocaust denial and genocidal hatred is not allowed if it derives from the Western world, like British Williamson. If Muslims do the same thing, nothing happens. This hypocrisy paradigm applies particularly – but not only – to today's Germany. If Arabs, other Muslims and their German friends scream "Death to the Jews," or "Israel – children killer", that's fine. If two lonely guys stick an Israeli flag in a bedroom window on a street where such anti-Semites pass, the police react immediately and confiscate the flag. That's what happened in the city of Duisburg on January 10.

In an interview with the *Ruhr-Nachrichten* newspaper, the head of the Verfassungsschutz (protection of the constitution) in

the German Federal Land North Rhine-Westphalia, Hartmut Müller, accused a group of so-called "anti-Germans" of being a dangerous element, "extremists". Those particular anti-Germans are otherwise known as friends of Israel and the US. Is it extremist to wave an Israeli flag in Germany today when more than 10,000 Palestinians and their friends shout "Death to the Jews" or similar slogans and burn an Israeli flag?

According to a recent BBC poll, Germany holds the most negative views of Israel among Western countries surveyed, with 9 percent seeing the Jewish state as "mainly positive" and 65% as "mainly negative" (compared with 47% positive and 34% negative in the US.) TO DISCUSS these frightening numbers, the B'nai B'rith of Berlin in cooperation with the American Jewish Committee Germany planned a panel discussion last Sunday on anti-Semitism and possible ways to fight it.

The event did not materialize, firstly because Prof. Wolfgang Benz, director of the Berlin Center for Research on Anti-Semitism, refused to be on the same panel as well known German-Jewish journalist Henryk M. Broder. Broder had criticized a conference hold by the center last December in which "Islamophobia" was compared to historical anti-Semitism. A newsletter of the center in January called the criticism of its Islamophobia conference in *Haaretz* and *The Jerusalem Post* "a torrent of hatred."

In the end AJC chairwoman Deidre Berger also cancelled her participation in the panel. Germany witnessed probably the biggest anti-Jewish rallies since 1945 during the Gaza war. Meanwhile research centers keep silent, refusing even to discuss such events with Jewish journalists, focusing instead on "Islamophobia." Why? Are Muslims threatened on German streets by Jewish gangsters screaming, "Death to all Muslims?" The reality is the opposite, yet no one is listening. Scholars are to take a wait and see attitude as to whether Iran is really dangerous. Germans (and Austrians) prefer to deal with dead Jews. In that, they are really experienced.

The writer is a post-doctoral researcher at the Yale Initiative for the Interdisciplinary Study of Anti-Semitism at Yale University, and has just published his second book Anti-Semitism and Germany: Preliminary Studies of a 'Heartfelt Relationship' (in German).