

Islamic Anti-Semitism

- While scholars debate on the nature of Islamic anti-Semitism, one can trace different attitudes in Islamic law and theology. Jews, as Christians, are considered monotheist and therefore entitled to sufferance under the status of dhimma. Nonetheless, they are believed to have distorted the message of the Bible and refused the prophet Muhammad.
- Islamic sources speak differently of Jews: some of them portray Jews in a positive fashion, while others describe them as manipulative and scheming. This has to do with Islamic history and with the occurrences in the life of the Prophet.
- Because of contrasting theological and legal sources, it is difficult to define a properly Islamic attitude toward Jews. Historically, Jews as other non-Muslim minorities under Islamic rule, have been exposed to social segregation under the system of the dhimma, which nurtured the stereotype of the Jew as weak and disloyal.
- Middle East historian Bernard Lewis stresses that, however, Islamic hostility toward the Jews has never been racial or ethnic, as developed in Europe.

Islamic and European anti-Semitism

- Many historians agree that European anti-Semitism was imported in the Middle East in the 19th century. Western anti-Semitic tenets like the “Jewish plot to dominate the world” have become established in the Islamic world, which already saw in the Jew a potential threat to Islamic order and authority.
- Furthermore, the Nazi influence on many Arab countries during 1930s and 1940s has also mobilised Arab Muslim masses against Jewish communities. The Gran Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseyni is believed to be a crucial figure in developing Islamic theological anti-Semitic thought.



- Even now, European anti-Semitic literature is widespread among Arabic readership, including Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” and “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion”, which have been for the past decade among the bestsellers in Middle East bookstores and among Arabic readers in Europe as well.



Virgin store in Dubai, Mein Kampf on the shelf.

Islamic anti-Semitism and Third Worldism

- The creation of Israel has amplified the belief that Jews are a threat for Islam and for the Arab nation. While the Arab-Israeli conflict is believed to be political or territorial, great part of anti-Israeli hostility in Arab countries is rooted in traditional anti-Semitic tenets.



- Anti-Zionism and anti-Israeli hostility are often conveyor of deeply anti-Jewish views, the existence of Israel being perceived as an affront to Islamic-Arab identity.



- Anti-Israeli rhetoric often uses a third wordlist language, disguising anti-Zionism through the discourse regarding the fight against the Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people.



- Palestinian Media Watch and MEMRI document the widespread dissemination of anti-Semitism in Islamic, Arab and Palestinian media, literature, public discourse and politics.
- Anti-Zionism and anti-colonialist discourses have united leftist currents that are profoundly anti-Israeli and Islamist currents that are vehemently anti-Jewish, combining apparently inconceivable mind-sets. Despite the profound differences in terms of human rights consideration and secularism, the radical left and Islamist movements share the anti-Jewish, anti-Israeli and anti-West antagonism originated in Marxist, anti-colonial and Islamic thoughts.

Islamic anti-Semitism in Europe

- Islamic anti-Semitism in Europe is a phenomenon of growing importance, both for the increasing Muslim population and for its alarming evolution. Anti-Semitic incidents in Europe are caused by far right, far left activists and members of the Muslim and Arab communities.
- Muslim anti-Semitic episodes are distinctively violent – among these the 2012 attack on Jewish school in Toulouse by Mohammad Merah, the constant attacks on Jews in Belgium and Sweden, and the anti-Jewish incitement in mosques all over Europe.



The victims of the 2012 Toulouse attack

- European authorities, although considering the increasingly disturbing phenomenon have not yet adopted any precise policy, refusing to address the specific issue of anti-Semitism spread in migrants communities originating from the Middle East and Muslim Africa.
- Anti-Semitic propaganda in Arab media diffused in Europe as well and the growing anti-Jewish hostility from far right and far left as a development of anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli demonization rise several questions about the future of European Jewry and the future of EU-Israel relations.

Interview with prof. Robert Wistrich



Neuburger Professor of European and Jewish History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and director of the Vidal Sassoon Center for the Study of Antisemitism

What is Islamic anti-Semitism?

If we use the adjective Islamic to qualify a distinctive form of anti-Semitism, especially in our own day, what we are referring to is a form of hostility toward Jews, Judaism, Zionism and the State of Israel, which claims to be based on the faith of Islam and its commandments. This is particularly true for all those trends that are often described as “fundamentalist”, which argue that the solution for the ills of the Islamic world today lies in a return to the core principles of the Islamic creed. This trend gives special emphasis to the commandment to wage a holy war, the so-called “jihad”, against the infidels. Infidels are seen first and foremost as being Jews and Christians, who each in different ways threaten the identity, the culture and beliefs of the Muslim “umma”, which is transnational and represents more than 1 billion believers.

The ideological basis of the Islamic war against the Jews, both verbal and physical, lies firstly in indigenous Muslim sources, especially the Quran – for instance the war that the Prophet Muhammad waged against the Jews in 7th century Arabia – in the Hadiths, and various traditions concerning the Jews handed down through the ages. This created a powerful stereotype, which to this day underlies much of Islamist anti-Semitism. In this imagery, the Jew is presented as treacherous, cunning, subversive, disobedient towards God, as guilty of killing the prophets who were sent to the Jewish people, and above all as an enemy of the unity and the creed of Islam.

So this is an anti-Semitism that claims its justification from divine authority. According to this perception, the character of the Jews and of Israel is predetermined for all time by the depiction in the Quran, and the problem will not be solved until Muslims are successfully mobilised to defeat and destroy the Jewish people.

In addition to this distinctively Islamic element, since the late 19th century, powerful European anti-Jewish motifs have penetrated the Arab and Islamic world. These include the blood-libel, derived from Medieval Christian sources, but today very widespread in the Arab media. It also includes the belief that the Jews seek world domination and that they control the banks, the media, the international capitalist system, the United States and Western imperialism, as well as being responsible for Communism and secular tendencies in general; hence, the popularity of the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion”, which has been a best seller for several decades in the Arab-Muslim world.

Arab nationalism is virulently anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist: does it also have anti-Semitic components?

I think it is true to say that, from its inception at the beginning of the 20th century, Arab nationalism has adopted an exclusionary attitude towards all non-Arab minorities and, in

most cases, adopted a suspicious and hostile position with regard to the Jews, who were seen either as agent of the West or as part of a Zionist fifth column.

After the creation of Israel in 1948, the position of Jews in Arab lands became untenable precisely because of these attitudes, but most likely they would have been expropriated and expelled, sooner or later, even without the existence of Israel. We can see that this happened to the French in Algeria, the Italians, Greeks and others in Egypt, and increasingly in recent decades to non-Muslim minorities, especially Christians, who are being harassed and persecuted throughout the Middle East.

Today we can see that the historic presence of Christian communities in Iraq and Syria is coming to an end; that Christians can barely exist in the Palestinian Territories; they are harassed in Egypt, Pakistan; and their future is very unsure in Lebanon. This is happening some sixty years after the Arab world began its ethnic cleansing of nearly one million Jews throughout the Middle East, and it casts a dark shadow over the whole discourse about Muslim tolerance.

In your last book, “From Ambivalence to Betrayal”, you trace an ideological convergence between Islamism and Marxism: what is it and how does Israel fall in between?

Initially, I think that the convergence had an instrumental character, and was initiated from the Communist side after the victory of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Lenin and his colleagues encouraged what I would call a “red jihad” against Western imperialism, especially that of Great Britain, in the Middle East and Asia, which he saw as an important reinforcement of the proletarian world revolution.

For the most part, Muslims were not particularly receptive to this propaganda, until the Nasserist and Baathist revolutions of 1950s and 1960s in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Algeria. During that period, antagonism toward Israel and the West became a cement for the alliance between the Soviet Union, its allies and Arab nationalism. The Islamist factor began to play a major role with the victory of the ayatollahs in the Iranian revolution in 1979. During the last thirty-five years, we have witnessed the rise of what I would call “Red Shi’ism”, which has positioned Iran, and the Hezbollah, as its auxiliary in the role of *avanguard* in creating an “alliance of the oppressed” against what they call “world arrogance” (the United States) and the “little Satan” Israel.

Behind this clerical ideology, which uses radical Leftist language to export revolution, there is a fully-fledged anti-Semitism theory, which combines the belief in a worldwide Jewish conspiracy with Holocaust denial and the occult influence of the Jews on all levers of power of the West. Iran extended his influence in the Arab world, which is ready to believe in these ideas, although it remains suspicious of Iranian intentions.

In my eyes, the most dangerous aspect of this toxic propaganda is that it has embedded itself so deeply in the body politic and public discourse of the world of Islam, that it creates a massive disconnect with reality and makes any reasonable solution to the question of Palestine extremely difficult.

Why does the New Left look with favour at Islamist movements?

One of the motivations for me to write my most recent book, *From Ambivalence to Betrayal*, was my realisation that broad segments of the Left, including parts of its mainstream opinion, have bought into this demonological perception of Israel, and of Jews more generally, in a completely uncritical, one-sided fashion. The Left has historically claimed to be the defender of universal human rights, the equality of women, secular humanistic values, respect for individual freedoms, and the right to dissent: none of which are observed under Islamic rule, or in countries strongly influenced by this trend.

Yet, instead of applying its own self-declared values to a sustained critique of the massive infringements of human rights and dignity in the Islamic world, a vitriolic and frequently malevolent campaign is waged against the only democratic society in the region. Israel takes seriously the need to respect these rights, even in a situation of war and external threat.

This is more than a double standard: it also involves certain deep-rooted prejudices and misconceptions regarding Jews, Judaism and the Jewish nation, which exist in Marxist and socialist thought since the 19th century. There is an endemic incapacity within most Marxist thought to grasp the singularities of Jewish history, the relationship of the Jews to the land of Israel, the national character of the Jewish people, as well as the universalist features in Judaism itself.

Perhaps, part of the problem of the Left today has also been the collapse of many of its own co-beliefs, which have left a vacuum in which all kind of causes, included that of radical Islam can be appealing – if only because they throw down a challenge to the hegemony of Western capitalism.

There are times when I feel that there is more than an element of cultural self-hatred in this position, much of which is then projected against Israel under the pretext that it is supposedly the last bastion of Western colonialism.

In your book you explain how the Marxist-Islamist axis have turned into anti-Israeli rhetoric and anti-Jewish intimidation in Central America, Venezuela in specific. Do you see any similar trends in Europe as well?

I have recently returned from two weeks spent in France. There, I observed a particularly ugly street demonstration, in which for the first time in a very brazen public way, anti-Semitic slogans were being shouted out, and specifically calling for the Jews to get out of France. The demonstrators were white, black and brown. Some came from the far right, some from the far left, and some were obviously supporters of the anti-Semitic French “humourist” Dieudonné.

I believe that in France we can see a microcosm of a wider trend in Europe, in which anti-Semitism provides an important cement to bridge over the gulf between right and left, secular and religious, as well as European and third world ideologies. The slogans which I heard reminded me of those that were widespread a century ago, when the ultranationalist “Action Française” was created, which already at that time attracted some elements from the far left. The guru of anti-Semitism in France today, Alain Soral, is himself an ex-Communist who went over to the National Front, and after leaving it now calls himself a National-Socialist “à la française”: anti-Semitism is his number one obsession and he is very close to Dieudonné.

The cause of Palestine has been the meeting place and the rallying cry for anti-Semites and anti-Zionists from the left in particular, but also from the radical right, to combine forces with the most dynamic mass movement of our time: radical Islam. It would appear that in such cases conducting a war against the mythical Jew has priority even over the traditional agendas of both the far right and the left.

This is surely a pathological symptom of the current state of much of European society.

You are a historian and as such you are not incline to foresee the future, I would however ask you how do you see the future of European Jewry in front of massive and radicalised Islamic communities?

You know, they say that “the prophecy is given only to fools after its great age came to an end”. However, I am ready to take that risk and to say that based on common trends the

future of most Jewish communities in Europe looks highly problematic; while I do not believe that they will disappear, except in those places where their number is already very small, I do foresee a growing emigration, especially of younger people who are concerned about their future and that of their children.

It is true that it is a general trend that effect non-Jews and that economic factors play an important role. But in the Jewish case, we have to add that there is a more inhospitable climate, which goes beyond the efforts to isolate and delegitimise Israel. For example, the attempted legislation against circumcision, kosher slaughter and the boycott movement in universities, have been a source of considerable anxiety for Jews along with the pressure that they have felt for the last two decades as a result of a large scale Muslim influx and the anti-Semitism which has accompanied it.

Moreover, the laxity of the European response at the level of the establishment and public opinion has contributed to this feeling of insecurity. Except for the larger critical mass of Jews in France, Britain and Germany, I think the future looks bleak; but even in those countries, especially in France, many Jews are looking elsewhere including very much to Israel.

And about Israel?

On the other hand, I believe that Israel's future is potentially bright, despite its current unpopularity and the frequently irrational responses that its actions seem to provoke. The reasons for my optimism are as follows: during the past few years we have seen some striking economic growth, many spectacular technological achievements, a more sober realistic attitude to the limits of power, even while developing powerful military deterrent against any potential aggressor. Most of Israel's Arab neighbours are in no position to threaten it, since they are undergoing massive internal dislocation, chaos and, in the case of Syria, a horrific civil war. True, there is a potentially serious terrorist threat from Hamas and Hezbollah, who would love to see Israel disappear, but they are impotent to bring this about; there is the looming threat of a nuclear Iran, which is the one major cloud on the horizon that could endanger Israel's existence, but I do trust that we will have the strength, the wisdom and the good fortune to overcome this too.

When I look back as someone who is more or less the age of the state, I see that with all our problems, we have come a very long way and when I think back to the nightmare of the Holocaust years, this seems to me to be quite literally a miracle. So, yes, I am optimistic.

Interview with Manfred Gerstenfeld



Former Chairman of the Steering Committee of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA) and founder of the JCPA Post-Holocaust and Anti-Semitism program.

Anti-Semitism in Europe is an increasing phenomenon. Among its promoters, there are Islamist activists within Arab and Muslim immigrant communities. How does this manifest itself?

We should not claim that the main promoters of anti-Semitism in Europe are Muslims. Statistics show that this is not true. However, the remarkable phenomenon associated with Islamic anti-Semitism is the disproportional number of incidents caused by Muslims in respect to their percentage in populations. Proportionally, Muslim anti-Semitic incidents are much more numerous than the incidents caused by native European anti-Semites. Moreover, incidents caused by Muslims are often more extreme. Finally, a major problem is that the Muslim leadership largely fails to address the issue and does not act against anti-Semites.

Is it connected to Islamist movements?

I do not believe that you can make a clear difference between “Islamic movements” and “Islamist movements” as far as anti-Semitism is concerned. “Islamist” is a term that has come into use for more extreme and radical views of Islam. However, this is a distinction that is not applicable in relation to anti-Semitic incidents. Indeed, many Muslims who perpetrate anti-Semitic incidents are not necessarily religious.

Ten years ago, Malaysian Prime Minister Mohamad Mahathir intervened in the Organization of Islamic Conference with anti-Semitic remarks. All Muslim country’s leaders applauded him and no one distanced himself from those views, in spite of many international reactions. This shows that anti-Semitism is a problem permeating many Muslim societies in the world, albeit to different degrees.

However, we should not generalize and behave like extreme right-wingers who reject the Muslim world as a whole. We should also recognize that there is an ideological Muslim criminality which is both anti-Christian and anti-Semitic as well as anti-Western and that there are also profound dissensions among different Muslim groups. Iran’s current Foreign Minister Zarif recently said that the most dangerous conflict is the Shi’i-Sunni clash, and he has a point.

What is Islamic anti-Semitism based on?

The religious element plays a major role. In this respect, it is not merely what a holy book says, but what that the believers make of it. If you read the Torah now, you may know very little about Judaism, which later developed a more detailed Jewish legal

tradition. The Quran contains hate text against Jews, defining them as “apes and pigs,” as well as discriminatory remarks against Christians. Many contemporary Muslims literally believe what is written. Therefore, there is an ideological-religious anti-Semitism, which inspires movements such as Hamas.

It is not the only component though. Europeans coming to the Middle East in the 19th century introduced Western anti-Semitic concepts: the 1840 blood-libel affair in Damascus was not a Muslim tradition, but a European hate import into the Arab-Islamic world.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the causes leading to virulent anti-Semitic manifestation. What are the consequences of Arab and Muslim mobilization for Jewish communities in Europe?

There are multiple consequences. The worst one is that Muslim attacks are the largest individual category of anti-Semitic incidents, although not the majority one. Surveys (such as the 2013 EU Fundamental Rights Agency Report on anti-Semitism, the UK Community and Security Trust statistics, the Dutch CIDI surveys) show that there is a significant problem while Muslims represent a small minority in most European countries.

The second issue is the more extreme nature of incidents caused by Muslims. In this respect, I want to recall three cases of murders in France: the 2003 assassination of Sebastien Selam by his Muslim childhood friend, the 2006 kidnapping, torture and assassination of Ilan Halimi by a gang of Muslims and the 2012 Muhammed Merah assassinations of a Jewish teacher and three children in front of a Toulouse Jewish school. Merah was under a religious influence, but I do not know if that was the case for the other two. A major question here is how European Jewry has changed as a result of increasing anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism? Synagogues and Jewish institutions need far more security than Christian or Muslim establishments. My new book, soon to be published, deals with this issue and other related ones in the framework of the delegitimization of Israel.

I have only talked about murders by Muslims in France. It is an evolving phenomenon. Initially, anti-Jewish attacks were perpetrated by non-European Muslims in Europe: the most well-known are the 1982 Goldenberg restaurant murders in Paris. Nowadays, attacks are perpetrated by European Muslims.

Secondly, there is a growing antagonism in Europe toward Jewish rituals, which is a side-effect of attacks on Muslim rituals. For instance, campaigns against female and male circumcision are primarily directed against Muslims, but campaigners also include Jewish circumcision to avoid accusations of racism. The same is true for ritual slaughter. This attitude fits in with the general anti-Muslim mood in Europe, but also affects Jews.

Thirdly, in a secularizing Europe, attacks on Muslims and Islam serve the cause against religion in general, including Christianity and Judaism. It was far more difficult to run anti-religious school campaigns before the major Muslim immigration. In the past, religious Jews would agree with school principals or with their bosses at work about keeping Shabbat; now, many people do not want to

recognize special rights for religious Jews, in order to avoid establishing a precedent on the basis of which Muslims could claim similar rights.

Finally, there is another important consequence, regarding politics. If you are an anti-Israel politician, you can now count on many Muslim votes, which in certain European countries is of growing importance. This is true in particular for local politics: although local politicians do not have an international portfolio, their anti-Israel arguments are appealing to a Muslim electorate. One larger case was that of Pascale Boniface, an advisor to the Social Party in France. He explicitly advocated for a pro-Islamic policy of the party on the ground that it would increase Muslim votes.

We live in post-modern times, and nothing is simple: these are gestures intending to attract Muslims, at the expense of Jews.

Does the Arab-Israeli conflict play a major role in current anti-Jewish sentiment?

Absolutely. A famous case was in Malmö, known as the capital of European anti-Semitism: former Social Democrat Mayor Ilmar Reepalu declared himself as being against anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, to appeal to Muslim electors. He also asked the Jews to condemn Israel. He did not ask the Muslims to condemn the extraordinarily murderous criminality characterising large parts of the Muslim world.

However, several surveys on anti-Semitism neglect the Muslim motive. Why?

There are several reasons. When in 2000, the big wave of anti-Semitism broke out in Europe, many incidents occurred in France, which hosts the largest Muslim and Jewish communities. The government of then-Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, who is neither an anti-Semite nor anti-Israeli, denied that anti-Semitic incidents were driven by a Muslim motive. The government did not want to deal with this issue, to single out Muslims, because they wanted to keep social peace out of fear that this may exacerbate social conflicts. Later in 2005, violent riots broke out in France: the rioters were all Muslims. Muslims had lashed out several years earlier at the Jews and much later they aimed massively at French society. Nicolas Sarkozy, when he became minister of the Interior in 2002 publicly recognised that there is anti-Semitism in France. President Jacques Chirac continued to deny the phenomenon for more than another year.

Secondly, this situation is partly the result of post-colonial theories, which hold the West eternally responsible for what goes on in former colonised countries. In the post-colonial approach Muslims are victims, and as such they cannot be perpetrators or guilty of crimes.

Although Muslim countries were colonised by Western powers for very short periods, and some of them were not even under foreign occupation...

That is true. Nonetheless, from the Holocaust the idea of the 'absolute victim' developed. Jews were these victims and nowadays Muslims are presented as such. Furthermore, according to socialist ideology, the victim cannot be wrong, because he is subject to unjust violence; therefore, the victim often cannot be a perpetrator.

Undoubtedly, there is growing Islamophobia in Europe due to European racist trends, but this should not impede discourse on anti-Semitism within European Muslim communities. It is however, difficult to talk about because this implies dealing with minority racism, a phenomenon that is inconceivable to many European eyes. Not long ago, an Israeli journalist carried out an investigation for Israeli broadcasting Channel 10 on European Muslim communities. Disguised as a Palestinian and speaking Arabic, he visited several Muslim communities around Europe revealing deep anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli racist sentiments. I believe it is absurd that an Israeli TV station has to carry out such an investigation rather than a European one. It is even more absurd that it has not been broadcast on any European station! There is a conspiracy of fairly substantial silence, which is part of what I term “criminal Europe.”

What do you mean by “criminal Europe”?

This is the main theme of my most recent book, *Demonizing Israel and the Jews*. The combined action of many factors in Europe including post-modernity, has resulted in the ideological criminalisation of Israel. Studies conducted in several countries in Europe show that many Europeans are convinced that Israel behaves like the Nazis toward the Palestinians, or is fighting a war to exterminate them – 38% of Italians share this view. In other countries results are even worse. Anyone visiting Israel can see that there are many Palestinians here and their population is growing. If you falsely accuse someone of being criminal, you yourself have a criminal mind-set. That is why I claim that large parts of Europe have a criminal mind-set: people hold certain irrational anti-Israel views, which are clearly false, and this is the end result of a criminal attitude.

What are authorities doing in this regard?

Sometimes they do take action, above all in schools; usually however, they do very little. Most of the reactions are rhetorical: authorities speak the right way without acting the right way.

The 1968 student riots in France and their aftermath brought about a progressive breakdown of authority in Europe: government, police, church, and parents. As a consequence, governments cannot cope with certain social phenomena.

I spoke about Malmö: Swedish judicial authorities have not followed through with complaints filed on anti-Semitic incidents perpetrated by Muslims. They also ignore anti-Israel incidents.

However, Muslims do not mainly cause anti-Israel sentiments in the mainstream of Western societies. Rather, certain parts of the left, academics and humanitarian organisations are responsible. There is extreme racism in anti-racist environments – think of what happened during the 2001 NGO conference in Durban on racism and xenophobia, which ended up as a huge anti-Semitic and anti-Israel event; or of the Goldstone Report, drafted by a United Nations Human Rights Council-appointed committee with a racist mandate.

Islamic massive immigration and the several complications stemming from Muslim integration are giving rise to a new wave of extreme Right-wing movements. What are the consequences for European politics in general and for Jewish politics specifically?

It is difficult to say, but we can draw some conclusions observing two EU countries: Hungary and Greece. In both countries, two large neo-Fascist or neo-Nazi movements are developing which are extremely anti-Semitic. However, the populist right is such a mixed bag that is difficult to foresee the outcome. Marine Le Pen in France is a populist, but not very neo-fascist, while her father is. Geert Wilders in the Netherlands is a populist, but not a neo-Fascist.

What should Europe do?

There are very few tools against anti-Semitism and Europe has recently taken a major step backward, by removing its definition of anti-Semitism from the website of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency.

In my opinion, most European leaders do not genuinely want to fight anti-Semitism, and they certainly do not want to fight anti-Israelism. Simply put, there is an ugly Europe developing. If the ambassador of the European Union to Israel makes false declarations about the EU's attitude toward Israel, he reflects a major European mentality and anti-Israel, yet false beliefs.

As I said, the major problem of Europe is the criminal mind-set of many of its citizens. And Israel is an excellent sensor of Europe's criminality. Europe should fight both anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism, because they are interrelated. Europe's leaders should analyse how this criminal mind-set against Israel has developed, however they do not want to do that, because it would lead to accusations of the EU itself, media, NGOs, leaders, politicians, religious leaders and civil society at large. This is precisely what Europe's leaders desperately want to avoid.