The Jewish Community of France - 2016

Not since World War Two have so many French Jews felt such an urgent need to flee. Not since the Holocaust have they felt such uncertainty about their future. Now, they are leaving for England with their EU passport and just a train ride away; for Canada where French is spoken; for the traditionally hospitable US or Australia; or for Israel, where 2015 saw the highest number of Jews making aliyah from a western country since 1948.

Half a million strong, French Jews represent the largest Jewish community in Europe and the third largest in the world. Today, however, this vibrant community feels under attack and not just from the murder of school children in Toulouse in 2012, the Hyper Cacher supermarket slaughter last year, or the three knife attacks against Jews in Marseilles between this past October and January. Daily harassment, internet slurs, and political extremism from the left and the right have left French Jews reeling from a deep sense of insecurity and a growing need for protection. In January, 2016, Agence France-Presse reported French government statistics that showed “anti-Semitic acts have soared in recent years, with the number reported between January and May 2015 increasing 84 percent compared with the same period in 2014.”

According to an official at the Paris-based Consistory of France that governs Jewish congregations, “At least 4,000 families left France in 2015 alone.”

Historically, French Jewry has been a symbol of Jewish emancipation in the modern world. The enlightened values that were introduced in the early 19th century would usher in newfound freedom and civil rights for Jews. Public secularism, known as “laïcité,” is the social foundation of the French Republic that promotes assimilation rather than multiculturalism, national identity rather than particular identity. But in an age of mass immigration and cultural conflict, laïcité translates into a strict division between religion and state whereby religious practices are deemed private matters and no group is allowed to stand out or receive special status. For Jews, not only does this mean there is little governmental support for Jewish institutions, but also little understanding of Jewish fears of what they perceive to be rising anti-Semitism in an increasingly hostile environment.

Marie Brenner wrote in Vanity Fair last August that “however established you have been as a Jew in France… you no longer have the luxury of feeling invisible. It is as if the Jews of France are being forced yet again into a ghetto of cultural identification. This, she wrote, “despite

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1 World News | Agence France-Presse | Tuesday January 5, 2016
France’s profound traditions of liberty, equality, and fraternity, not to mention laïcité...”3 To underscore the sentiment, Zvi Ammar, head of the Marseille Jewish community, the second largest in France, told NPR Radio in January that he encouraged Jews to stop wearing kippot in public for the time being, “at least until these barbarians calm down.”4 Even before then, a survey conducted in 2013 by FRA (the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights) found that 29% of French Jews avoid wearing, carrying or displaying items in public that could identify them as Jews and fully 79% take steps to prevent themselves from being identified as Jews.5 Some in the French establishment understood the significance of this trend. Parliamentarian Xavier Bertrand said on a popular radio show that "If the Jews of Marseille don't wear their kippahs, France is no longer France.”6

Insecurity and Fear:
According to Dov Maimon, Senior Fellow at The Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI), the discomfort among French Jews is widespread and expected to continue. Three general shifts over the last ten years have influenced the change: First, the deterioration of the French economy; second, the influx of Muslim immigrants (today numbering some five million); and third, an identity crisis in French society that is xenophobic in nature.7 When coupled with the radicalization of Islamists, the popular rise of the National Front and a blurring of anti-Israel with anti-Jewish sentiments, Jews have come to feel singled out and vulnerable.

This is especially true in light of the rising anti-Semitic activity on French soil. The number of attacks targeting Jews doubled from 423 in 2013 to 851 in 2014, according to a report from the French Jewish Community Security Service, including more than 108 incidents of physical violence.8 A report by Human Rights First organization, “Breaking the Violence: Countering Anti-Semitism and Extremism in France”9 notes that of all hate incidents in France in 2014, 51% were anti-Semitic. Many more go unreported, given the statistic complied by the FRA survey of 2013 that found 23% of French Jews have personally felt discriminated against on the basis of their religion in the past 12 months.10

While the thrust of physical attacks has come from Islamic extremists, French Jews live in a society that remains largely anti-Semitic. A 2015 IPSOS survey, “Game Changers” of the IPSOS Global Operations Survey Management, showed that anti-Semitic stereotypes are strong within the general population: Almost all of those interviewed believe that "Jews are welded together" (91%); a majority believes that "the Jews have too much power" (56%); that they "are richer

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4 http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/01/14/463010103/after-attack-an-uproar-over-a-call-for-french-jews-to-quit-wearing-yarmulkes
6 http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/01/14/463010103/after-attack-an-uproar-over-a-call-for-french-jews-to-quit-wearing-yarmulkes
7 Meeting with Dov Maimon, JPPI, April 20, 2016
8 http://www.antisemitisme.fr/dl/2014-EN.pdf
than the average French" (56%); and that "they are more attached to Israel than to France" (53%).

For its part, the French government has taken action to try and calm the Jewish community’s fears and to reassure them that the government is committed to their security. After Hyper Casher, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve went to the Montrouge Jewish School that is located at a synagogue and announced “the reinforcement of security measures outside Jewish schools and synagogues where police have already been deployed following other anti-Semitic attacks with the deployment of 4,700 police and paramilitary gendarmes.” He said the army would also be on hand within two days, and appointed a prefect to oversee security in future at France’s 717 Jewish schools and places of worship.

The French Prime Minister Manuel Valls spoke loudly of French support for the community in hopes of stemming the flood of Jews leaving. Calling anti-Zionism “an invitation to anti-Semitism,” he noted that prejudice is “growing in an insufferable manner in our country.” He pledged 100 million euros toward combating “racism and anti-Semitism” and launched a National Action Plan to Fight Racism and Anti-Semitism in 2014. After the deadly attack on the Hyper Casher, Prime Minister Valls declared that “France without Jews is not France,” and an estimated 3.7 million people joined in a solidarity march with all of the victims of that week’s violence, prompting the French Chief Rabbi Haim Korsia to say that “the Jewish community is not as isolated as we thought.”

Israel’s Ambassador to France, Aliza Ben Noun, told the Jerusalem Post last January that in all of her encounters with the French-Jewish community, they said that they “feel that the government is doing whatever it can, and beyond, to protect the synagogues and the Jewish schools.” And this, she said, “is also something that I hear in almost every meeting I have with French officials: their total commitment to protect the community and a zero-tolerance approach to anti-Semitism.” In a meeting that Israel’s President Ruby Rivlin held in Jerusalem on May 3, 2016 with a delegation of French regional, parliamentary, and Jewish community leaders organized by CRIF, the umbrella body of the Jewish community in France, he praised the French government: "I want to thank the French authorities for their work to protect the Jewish community and to combat anti-Semitism and all hatred."

The political dimension of the current situation in France, however, is troubling. The community is torn between two bad options, as Dov Maimon sees it: “Either they support the left wing agenda - advocating strengthening immigrants’ political position, which will increase the standing of the Jewish community but will help the Muslim community much more; and, if the Muslim leadership remains anti-Jewish, the standing of the Jewish community will continue to fall. Or, they support the right wing agenda - advocating for a secular state and an anti-religion

14 Ibid.
15 http://time.com/3669544/history-jews-in-france
17 http://gpoeng.gov.il/
philosophy, in which case the Jewish community's standing will diminish and many Jews will choose to leave the country.”

Either way, with the culture of “laïcité,” the French public will not prioritize Jewish concerns. According to a 2015 report from focus groups in France, “Protecting the French Jews and Rising Anti-Semitism” conducted by Stanley Greenberg and Anna Warm in conjunction with CRIF, the French people are seeking to “protect all French citizens from racism and hate crimes;” not specifically Jews or anti-Semitism. And, remarkably, “the French public has no consciousness that French Jews are under attack more than other communities and no consciousness that Jews are targets of a rising number of attacks.” The report, commissioned by the CRIF to understand existing attitudes among the French, suggests that given the overriding French desire to keep religious conflicts out of secular France and to avoid importing “extremism” – be it radical Islam or Zionism – turning these “Jewish” concerns into “French” concerns is the better approach for Jewish community messaging.

Anne Schiller, a multi-media designer living in Paris with her husband and four children, is struck by the hypocrisy of the French response to anti-Jewish activity. “Following the Second World War, and until the late 1990’s, anti-Semitism was viewed as really bad, unacceptable. But the Second Intifada brought a different association with Israel and a shift in attitudes.” Schiller points to Toulouse where the attack in 2012 was seen by the French public as a fight between Palestinians and Jews. “A Jewish child was killed because Palestinian children are being killed” went the reasoning. But when the same logic was applied in the Charlie Hebdo attack, “that French people were killed because Syrian children are being killed, now the French are appalled!” For Jews, she says, 2012 was their wake up call. “For the French, Charlie Hebdo was their 9-11.”

The Organized Community:

Four major organizations represent the French Jewish community on these issues and in all communal matters: The CRIF, The Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France; FSJU, The United Jewish Social Fund with community centers that deal with culture, education and youth; and the Consistorie of France governing Jewish congregations. The FMS, Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah created in 2000 as part of the recognition and compensation for the Holocaust in France.

About 350,000 of France’s 500,000 Jews reside in Paris and its suburbs. Other large Jewish communities include Marseilles (70,000), Lyon (25,000), Toulouse (23,000), Nice (20,000), Strasbourg (16,000), Grenoble (8,000) and Nancy (4,000). 25% of the Jews are Ashkenazi and 75% are Sephardic who came to France in the 1960’s and 70’s as French nationals from North Africa.

The major religious stream in France is modern Orthodox and most modern Orthodox synagogues are affiliated with the Consistoire. An estimated 7% of French Jews are ultra-Orthodox and 5% are either Conservative or Reform. There have been a growing number of

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18 Meeting with Dov Maimon, JPPI, April 20, 2016
19 Paris Focus Groups, 2015, Greenberg and Warm
20 Telephone conversation with Anne Schiller, April 18, 2016
21 http://www.eurojewcong.org/communities/france.html
kosher restaurants and kosher butchers in the past few years, especially in Paris, where, according to Dov Maimon, there are 350 kosher restaurants alone.

Some 700 Jewish community buildings serve Jews across France, 500 of them are synagogues, 150 day schools (20 in Paris) and the rest are multi-purpose community buildings. There are more than 40 Jewish weekly and monthly publications, as well as numerous Jewish youth movements and organizations.

With rising concerns for their safety, more Jewish children are moving out of public schools and today an unprecedented 40% attend full-time Jewish schools and 35% attend Catholic schools. The intermarriage rate is considered to be between 50 - 70%.

French Jewish organizations are undoubtedly under tremendous stress to meet the needs and concerns of the community. Nonetheless, they are viewed by some, according to Maimon, as "lacking in vision and leadership." Anne Schiller feels that the CRIF does not represent her family. "It tends to be more conservative and politically right of center; it does not represent left-wing Jews."

The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), ORT and the Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC) work closely with the community in France and below are brief descriptions of their work on the ground according to each organization:

- JAFI has a particularly high presence at this time of insecurity, and works closely with Israel’s Ministry of Absorption toward implementing a "France First" plan that encourages and assists French Jews who want to immigrate to Israel. JAFI has a team of 20 workers in Paris that deal with French aliyah and absorption, 2 employment coordinators and an office in Marseilles, regular appointment hours in Nice, Lyon, Strasbourg and Toulouse, and coordinates aliyah fairs attracting hundreds of French participants seeking more information on the aliyah process. In addition, JAFI has three regional shlichim working with the Jewish communities, three shlichim who work specifically with youth and students, and five shlichim who work with Jewish youth movements. JAFI initiated the Zayit (Zehut Yehudit beTochniot) program in local Jewish schools that integrates courses on Jewish history, the Holocaust, Zionism, and Israel into the curriculum. The shlichim organize community events in order to strengthen Jewish identity and the connection to Israel and recruits participants for programs in Israel, such as Birthright, which brings more than 4,000 participants per year; Masa, with more than 1500 participants per year; and "Bac Bleu Blanc," a project that brings nearly 1,000 high school seniors to Israel every year. At the same time, The Jewish Agency is assisting with the security apparatus of Jewish communities across France. The Fund for Emergency Assistance to Jewish Communities, which was established in 2012 following the attack against the Jewish

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22 http://www.eurojewcong.org/communities/france.html
23 JAFI report on French Jewish community, 2016
24 http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/France.html
26 Power point prepared by Dov Maimon for Minister Zev Elkin, 2016.
27 Meeting with Dov Maimon, JPPI, April 20, 2016
28 Telephone conversation with Anne Schiller, April 18, 2016
school in Toulouse, has provided Jewish communal institutions in France with the means to install and reinforce security measures where they are most needed.  

- JDC France focuses on cultivating young leaders through innovative pan-European programs Gesher and Rescape, and by supporting young adult initiatives such as Nevatim for young professionals and the Moishe House, and JDC CONNECT – a professional and personal development conference for French-speaking Jews aged 25-40. To better understand the younger generation, The JDC-International Centre for Community Development (ICCD) is currently partnering with local agencies to conduct a survey among 18 to 26 year olds to research their daily experience as Jews, needs and expectations. JDC also works toward interfaith understanding through encounters held in Paris this year with the Moishe House; a partnership with Coexister France, a nationwide interfaith movement in a four-day leadership-training seminar for future leaders; and co-sponsorship of an interfaith event at the Paris municipality together with the local Reform movement and with other religions. JDC also works with SPCJ, a French security NGO, to provide training sessions and community awareness briefings to members of the Jewish community.

- ORT France has seven vocational and technical colleges, as well as junior high and high schools across the country located in Paris, Lyon, Marseille, Strasbourg, Toulouse and Villiers-le-Bel. The 3,500 students are aged between 14 and early twenties are trained in a wide variety of disciplines leading to professional qualifications up to bachelors and masters levels. With an emphasis on entrepreneurship and business skills, many graduates go on to become self-employed. ORT expects the number of students to rise to 4,000 by 2020.

- ITC has been working closely with the JDC, JAFI and the OSE, France’s main Jewish children’s aid society, to provide a coordinated response to the effects of psycho-trauma as a result of the terrorist assaults in France. This year, they opened a Psycho-Trauma and Resilience Center, based on the successful ITC model for Southern Israel, which provides clinical support to the community as well as ongoing training for professionals. In the past year, 80 professionals (psychologists/psychiatrists/social workers) were trained by ITC experts in the area of psychological first aid and short term focused post-traumatic treatment to individuals, groups and teams. A more select group of mental health professionals were trained as trainers and 200 teachers were trained in BASIC PH and stress reduction as part of the school intervention program that OSE is leading.

A New Reality – Community in Transition:

For most citizens, including Jews, France is a country in decline – 79% of French citizens believe it and 53% think that the situation is irreversible, according to the 2015 IPSOS “Game Changers” survey. EU figures of 10% unemployment (the highest in ten years) and 24% unemployment
among the younger generation\textsuperscript{35} points to an economic trend that is continuing to plummet, with harsh results among the educated and professional class. In 2012, 250,000 French left France in search of better opportunity – 75% of them held academic degrees, and as of 2014 two million French were living abroad.\textsuperscript{36} A 2013 survey of the FRA European Union of the Fundamental Rights Agency found that 58% of the general French public believes it is unlikely they will find a job in the next 6 months; 79% of college graduates are considering immigration within 5 years; and, 52% of young adults are considering immigration due to employment issues.\textsuperscript{37}

For Jews, especially with Israel as an option, the economic crisis coupled with an anti-Jewish atmosphere has prompted the emergence of what Maimon calls “transnational identity:” a growing reality of bi-national existence where Jews travel back and forth all of the time, living between the “capital of Tel Aviv and the suburb of Paris.” With some 150,000 French Jews already living in Israel, Maimon believes “the center of gravity is already there.”\textsuperscript{38}

Although 200,000 of France’s 500,000 Jews are affiliated through synagogue memberships, it is the 50,000 most active as donors and in support for Israel whose potential departure raises the greatest concern for the continuation of the community: “If these Jews leave,” Maimon said, “there will be no organizational future, no leaders left.”\textsuperscript{39} Given that today it is more common for French Jews to hide their identity than to flaunt it, and to avoid public demonstrations of communal vibrancy, those seeking a fully expressive Jewish existence will have to look beyond French borders to find it.

Stark statistics from two recent surveys tell the story: FRA Europa found in 2013 that 89% of Jews in France feel that anti-Semitism levels went up in the past 5 years; 49% have considered immigration because of fear for their safety due to their religion; 20% avoid visiting certain areas in their neighborhood because they do not feel safe being Jewish there.\textsuperscript{40} And a 2014 Siona survey found more than 70% of French Jews do not see a future for themselves or their children in France. Of the 74.2% of respondents who said they are considering leaving, 29.9% cited anti-Semitism; 24.4% cited their desire to preserve their Judaism; 12.4% said they were attracted by other countries; and 7.5% cited economic considerations. In total, 95.2% of all respondents to the online survey said they viewed anti-Semitism as “very worrisome” or “worrisome.” Slightly more than half, or 57.5%, of respondents, said “Jews have no future in France,” while 30.6% still believe there is a future for Jews there.\textsuperscript{41}

As such, the numbers of French Jews choosing to leave France have risen dramatically in the last few years with France becoming Israel’s greatest source of immigration. AntiSemitismWatch reported in May 2015 that emigration from France to Israel tripled from 1,900 in 2012, doubled

\textsuperscript{35} \url{http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics}
\textsuperscript{36} \url{http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/french-say-au-revoir-to-france-over-two-million-french-people-now-live-abroad-and-most-are-crossing-9788348.html}
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} \url{http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2013-factsheet-jewish-people-experiences-discrimination-and-hate-crime-eu_en.pdf}
\textsuperscript{41} \url{http://www.siona.fr/sondage-siona-jforum-antisemitisme-en-france-en-2014}
from 3,400 in 2013, and reached 7,000 in 2014\(^{42}\) – with JAFI reporting the stunning figure of 50,000 aliyah inquiries made that year. By 2015, the number of immigrants to Israel rose to 7,900.\(^{43}\) In one Paris school, Lucien de Hirsch, where its 1,000 students are protected by armed guards and security cameras, 36% of students left for Israel this year. “The reality is that Jews are choosing to leave,” said Headmaster Paul Fitoussi, “and the numbers show it.”\(^{44}\)

Noémie Bouzy Gozlan, with vast experience working directly with French Jewish youth, sees a difference between young "right wing" and "left wing" Jews with “the right wingers mostly looking to immigrate to Israel and the left wingers looking to immigrate to the U.K. or the U.S.” Almost all, she says, “are talking about leaving France.”\(^{45}\) Whether it is the rise in anti-Semitism and the lack of security that is driving them to leave, or they no longer feel safe identifying as Jewish, or they see no economic future in France, a growing number of Jews are on their way out.

Not all French Jews, however, believe that fleeing is the solution. Among those who are convinced that French Jews must stay and fight for their place in the French Republic is the renowned writer Bernard-Henri Levy, who told the Washington Post this past February that there is certainly an emergency regarding Judaism in France today. “There is a growing and increasingly strong anti-Semitism not only in France, not only in Europe, but all over the world, including America. The old plague that is anti-Semitism is clearly growing.” But, he believes, “the only way to face it is not to keep in the shadow but to express the values of Judaism in full light. Not to withdraw to a minimal Judaism compatible with a minimal Republican idea, but the opposite, a Judaism that accepts its own destiny.” He went on to say that if Jews were to go away “as some have started doing already, I think that France would lose a real part of its spirit and genius... There is a profound legitimacy in remaining in France. Those who would make aliyah because they are Zionists, I respect that. Who knows if I wouldn’t be among them one day. But I would certainly not leave because of fear, because of melancholy, or because of despair.”\(^{46}\)

For those who are choosing to stay in France, life is a challenge. “It is easier if you live in Paris where there is low Jewish density and you don’t have to identify as Jewish outside of your home,” Anne Schiller explained. “But for those in the northern suburbs where there are few Jews and more Arabs living, it is difficult to be a Jew.”\(^{47}\) Even in Paris, she said, “Jews take steps not to be visible.” Schiller, who is secular, warns her children to be careful voicing pro-Israel opinions, to not draw attention to being Jewish. The Schillers are not leaving today – although two of their children are studying in London. But when asked about the future, what will be, Anne Schiller says she and her husband expect they will go one day too. Meanwhile, they have done everything they possibly can to ensure that their children have the skills and the ability to leave France. “I want to make it easy for them, just in case it becomes necessary.”\(^{48}\)

\(^{42}\) [http://www.antisemitismwatch.com/2015/05/10/jews-of-france-leaving-for-foreign-shores/](http://www.antisemitismwatch.com/2015/05/10/jews-of-france-leaving-for-foreign-shores/)

\(^{43}\) [www.jafi.org](http://www.jafi.org)


\(^{45}\) April 5, 2016, [https://news.vice.com/contributor/vice-news](https://news.vice.com/contributor/vice-news)

\(^{46}\) Meeting with Noémie Bouzy Gozlan on April 20, 2016

\(^{47}\) Telephone conversation with Anne Schiller, April 18, 2016

\(^{48}\) Ibid.