

"There is an astonishing rise of anti-Semitism around the world" "There is a staggering rise in anti-Semitism around the world"

BEHIND THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF ANTI-SEMITIC ATTACKS AND INCIDENTS, "IT IS THE SECURITY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, AND ULTIMATELY ITS VIABILITY THAT IS AT STAKE" ON THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT, SAYS THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE (AJC) TED DEUTCH, FORMER ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES HOUSE, IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE "FIGARO".

 9 minutes

LE FIGARO. - You finish a trip to Europe, in the wake of the anti-Jewish attacks in Amsterdam. How to understand this explosion of anti-Semitic hatred in the heart of Europe?

TED DEUTCH. - There has been an astonishing rise in anti-Semitism around the world. We were shocked to experience it in America. But after Jews were literally chased in the streets of Amsterdam, it became clear to us that this crisis had to be denounced and that governments had to react, that the urgency had to be recognized. The message is the same everywhere. The 250%, 400% or 1,000% increase in anti-Semitism is not reduced to numbers. It is the security of the Jewish community, and ultimately the viability of this community in Europe, that is now at stake. That is why we are calling on the European Commission to put the dramatic rise of anti-Semitism at the centre of the agenda.

Do the European leaders you meet have the same view of the causes of the phenomenon? Is it linked to Islamism, to an alliance between

Islamists and left-wing extremism? Wider?

It's really a witch's cauldron. There are the radical Islamists, those who, on the extreme left, have adopted calls for the destruction of Israel as part of their decolonial ideology and also the extreme right. Each challenge is significant but when the extreme left joins the Islamists, it leads to the call for violence of the immediate after October 7. This phenomenon was triggered before a single Israeli soldier entered Gaza. From the beginning, the protests were demonstrations in support of Hamas that justified terrorism, murder and rape. This celebration of violence is incompatible with democratic values.

What is the response to this hatred?

We always insist that, regardless of the size of the Jewish community, the presence of anti-Semitism in a country is not only a risk to the Jewish population, but a sign of a rotting in society that must be treated. The globalization of the problem is the reason why the AJC works closely with the Crif. For the first time, we will organize a joint summit in Paris in June that will systematically monitor the efforts of our governments in terms of anti-Semitism.

Has the Israeli-Palestinian conflict been imported into Europe?

What we see is not the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at this stage. Israel is engaged in a war on seven fronts that all refer to its great opponent: Iran. We had Iran's direct attacks last April and October, Iran's support for Hamas and Hezbollah, and Iran's awareness that a more normalized Middle East, with Israel at the heart of this normalization, would pose a threat to the radical ideology that Iran is seeking to export. To understand that the subject is not the Palestinian question, it is enough to remember that during the attack of October 7, most of

the attack hit Israelis who had chosen to settle in southern Israel and who, in many cases, were there because they deeply believed in peace with the Palestinians and worked hard to advance it.

In Europe, criticism of Israel nevertheless focuses on the blind military response against civilians and the rejection of peace with the Palestinians. International tribunals have accredited the charge of genocide and the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant against Netanyahu.

The ICC case is a clear example of the reversal of international law, because it puts an equivalence between the actions of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Minister of Defense, both from a democracy, with the leaders of a terrorist organization. Moreover, the Court ignores the fact that its jurisdiction can only be mobilized if countries are not able to act within their own judicial system, which is not the case in Israel. It was clear that the objective was to politicize the ICC, in particular by using the history of the Holocaust to turn the accusation of genocide against Israel. The ideologues who take these positions have managed to convince people that calling for the murder of Jews is unacceptable, but that calling for the destruction of Israel is justified. However, it does not take much analytical mind to understand that calling for the destruction of Israel is calling for the massacre of the Jews. This is new, it is the existence of a strong modern State of Israel and the ability it offers Jews to return to their homeland, which has become a vibrant democracy of the 21st century in the middle of a truly difficult region.

Was the American answer sufficient? What will Trump do?

Campuses are an interesting subject, because this is where a large part of the

problems (*of anti-Semitism, Editor's note*) took place in the United States. The Biden administration has launched a number of investigations and universities have committed to taking action. The closure of a campus by an anti-Israel crowd is not a matter of freedom of expression. President-elect Donald Trump published a video in which he was very direct in saying that if universities did not change, funding would be removed. It is very important for us, as part of the work we carry out with universities, to know that there will be sanctions if planned measures are not implemented. It is also essential to clarify that Israel is waging a self-defense war and that this clarity comes from the White House.

Many in Paris say: we support the Jews after the terrible attack, but the war must stop and Netanyahu get rid of his alliance with the ultra-right to make peace.

The first thing everyone should focus on is how to end this war. And it is important to remember that it would have ended months ago if Hamas had taken the hostages. It was Hamas that started the war, not Israel. The massacre of October 7 was the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust. The idea that after October 7, after babies were burned, women raped and while 101 hostages remained detained by Hamas, the top priority should be to tell Israel what its government should look like is absurd. Are there any legitimate conversations to be held about the future of Israel and the Palestinians? Absolutely. But let's move the situation forward by making the hostages. This will allow the region to advance towards everything that Iran was trying to block. Then we can move towards peace between Israel and the Palestinians. I was part of the Middle East Subcommittee in the House of Representatives and these issues are also part of my work at the AJC. Israel had withdrawn from Gaza. Hamas has set up a massive terrorist structure and

used it to strike. And should the attackers of October 7 be rewarded by creating a state? It's not serious. The future of the region will have to result from negotiations that will require a series of steps that are now very difficult to imagine. It is mainly about the deradicalization of Palestinian society, which will lead Palestinians to recognize that Israel is a state that will always exist. The Abraham agreements have shown, in a place like Abu Dhabi, where mutual tolerance can lead. There is a church, synagogue and mosque in the heart of the Muslim Middle East, all of exactly the same size in the same space. This is a sign of possibilities in a country that has normalized its relations with Israel and taken deradicalization measures. The Saudis have also devoted enormous resources to modifying their textbooks in order to move towards a regional peace based on mutual respect. Conversely, the Palestinian Authority, as we speak, still has a program that pays terrorists and their families according to the severity of the terrorist attack committed. It can put an end to this practice, which would be a spectacular recognition of the fact that terrorism is not the way.

What do you expect from Trump in foreign policy?

In 2016, Trump had never been president before. The selection of candidates for high-level positions had been dramatic. But this time, in foreign policy, many of his choices are well known. I am thinking of Marco Rubio, appointed Secretary of State, whom I know from Florida, a serious and very thoughtful thinker in foreign policy. He understands America's place in the world. National Security Advisor Mike Waltz is also someone I met at Congress, also very serious. He has worked for Americans who were hostages or illegally detained and so I know how he will react to countries like Iran. Elise Stefanik, appointed ambassador to the UN, will be very firm on the global scourge of anti-

Semitism, something that undermines the functioning of the United Nations... The question of Ukraine is the one we all ask ourselves. The American Jewish Committee strongly supported her. We also note the link between the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Iranian strikes on Israel and the killer drones that go from Iran to Russia and that the latter uses to kill Europeans. Everything is linked and we encourage the Trump Administration to recognize this link.

WORDS COLLECTED BY L. M.