

Contemporary Antisemitism in the Political Discourse in Spain

Having a precious, rich, and complex Jewish past and a vibrant Jewish community, Spain decided to create a solid framework of rules and initiatives to fight relentlessly against antisemitism and every form of xenophobia and racism. There are, of course, many more nations—both present here and others—that are making similar efforts and progress; but, while I remain optimistic, I know—we all know—that we will always need to persevere together so that those words we have repeated so many times, “never again,” remain our guiding and unwithering principle.

—HM King Felipe VI of Spain,
World Holocaust Forum,
January 22, 2020

Antisemitism in modern-day Spain has never been an organized political phenomenon; rather it is a manifestation of persistent anti-Jewish stereotypes in Spain’s society and culture, based on religious and mainly Catholic foundations (Menny, 2014). The de facto absence of Jews in Spain from the 15th to the 19th centuries, however, means that antisemitism in the country cannot be explained simply by the conflict between the Christian majority and the Jewish minority. Therefore, the phenomenon in Spain should be explained in the context of “antisemitism without Jews.” According to the scholar Anna Menny, antisemitism in Spain is not generally directed against the country’s Jewish community but rather against the image of the Jew as representing the “stranger” or the “immigrant” (Menny, 2014).

Menny has argued that the current image of the Jews in Spain is influenced by three main factors. The first is the Catholic tradition within Spanish society. Spain’s national perception is partly based on the link between

its national identity and the Catholic religion, and it marks the Jews as the “other” in Spanish society. The strong ties between state and church have led to the persistence of anti-Jewish stereotypes in Spanish society. A second factor is Israel’s policy in the Middle East. Spain has witnessed a visible increase in antisemitic incidents and in the popularity of antisemitic attitudes around events that relate to the Arab–Israeli conflict, especially in the early 2000s, during the Second Intifada. The third factor is the attitude toward immigration in Spain (Menny, 2014).

Background

Currently there are an estimated 13,000 Jews in Spain, who account for about 0.03% of the total population (DellaPergola & Staetsky, 2020). Most of the community lives in Madrid and Barcelona. A large part of the community consists of Spanish-speaking Jews who returned to Spain after several hundred years of exile in northern Morocco. Ashkenazim (primarily from Latin America, but also from European backgrounds) also have moved to Spain in recent decades. The umbrella organization of Spanish Jewry is La Federación de Comunidades Judías de España, which is also the Spanish branch of the World Jewish Congress (World Jewish Congress, n.d.d).

According to a 2018 report by the Kantor Center, antisemitism is not particularly prevalent in Spain when compared to other European countries (such as Germany, France, and Britain). However, as in other Western countries, most of the reported antisemitic incidents have been carried out by the extreme right, the extreme left, and anti-Zionist and radical Islamic groups. In this context, vandalism against Jewish institutions has characterized most of the reported violent antisemitic incidents (Kantor Center, 2018). Furthermore, a survey carried out in 2010 revealed a significant drop in traditional antisemitic attitudes among the Spanish public, as a result of Spain’s ongoing secularization since the 1970s. In the latest public opinion survey on antisemitism that was carried out by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in 2019, members of a representative sample of adults were asked to what extent they agree with 11 antisemitic statements or stereotypes (see Figure 29). It found that 28% of the respondents agreed with at least six antisemitic stereotypes. The most worrying result was that 62% of the respondents agreed with the statement that “Jews are more loyal to Israel than to [this country/to the countries they live in].” Meanwhile, 49% agreed

with the statement that “Jews have too much power in international financial markets” (ADL, 2019).

Figure 29. ADL Poll on Antisemitism in Spain



Note. From ADL, *ADL Global 100: An Index of Anti-Semitism, Spain, 2019*

The latest reports of the Crime Statistics System (SEC), a database of reports from various law enforcement agencies in Europe, show that in 2018 nine antisemitic incidents were reported in Spain. In total, during 2013–2018, there between three and nine incidents annually, apart from 2014 when the Israeli military engaged in Operation Protective Edge in the Gaza Strip, leading to a spike of 24 antisemitic incidents.³¹ In 2018, the antisemitism database in Spain (El Observatorio de Antisemitismo en España) reported two antisemitic incidents on the internet, two in the media, two cases of vandalism, one physical assault, and five cases of Holocaust denial (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017). In 2019, the legal authorities in Spain reported about five antisemitic incidents in total (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE], 2020b).

Laws Against Antisemitism and Their Enforcement

Spain’s criminal code includes a section on hate crimes. As a result, the government of Spain gathers data on hate crimes from the law enforcement agencies and publishes them each year. The law enforcement agencies work to identify the motivation behind the hate crimes, while antisemitism is

included as a separate category alongside others, such as racism, discrimination against Muslims, and discrimination against the disabled (OSCE, 2020b). In July 2020, the Spanish government adopted the definition of antisemitism as defined by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) (Reine, 2020).

Antisemitism on the Political Left

Most of the cases in which political parties or politicians are accused of antisemitism in the current political discourse in Spain involve the populist left party Podemos, which was established in 2014. Some of the party's leaders are fervently opposed to Israel's policy in the context of the Israel–Palestinian conflict and they support the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, which calls for the boycott of Israel (see Figure 30). In Spain's 2015 parliamentary elections, Podemos became the third largest party in the Spanish parliament, gaining 69 out of 350 seats and 21.2% of the popular vote. In the general elections held in Spain in 2016, the party united with another left-wing party and obtained a similar percentage of the popular vote. In the 2019 elections, the party joined the ruling coalition, even though it had lost a significant number of votes and became only the fourth largest party in the parliament (Hedgecoe, 2019).

Pablo Iglesias Turrión, the founder of the movement and its leader, moderated a talk show on HispanTV, owned by an Iranian citizen and mainly targeting Latin American countries, during 2013–2019. The Spanish police recently revealed that the media company owned by Iglesias had received about 9 million euro over the years from Iran, via various money transfer channels (Radio Farda, 2020; Lázaro, 2020). Over the years, his program had presented antisemitic content. For example, in April 2018 the guests on the show claimed that “the Wall Street Journal is controlled by the Jews,” and Iglesias had even shared them on his personal YouTube channel, which he then removed in July 2020 (Radice, 2020). Iglesias served as the second deputy prime minister and as a minister in the Spanish government, which has been in power since early 2020. In May 2021 he announced his retirement from politics.

Figure 30. Calls to Boycott Israel by Leader of Podemos**Pablo Iglesias wants Spanish cities to boycott Zionist state**

By Lúcia Rodrigues
lbraspal

Spain has been a stumbling block for Israelis. The campaign of the BDS movement (Boycott, Development and Sanctions) is gaining the support of the Spanish population.

Pablo Iglesias, leader of PODEMOS, a left-wing party whose coalition took third place in the last presidential elections, classified Israel as a criminal and illegal country.

Note. From Lúcia Rodrigues, “Pablo Iglesias quer que cidades espanholas boicotem Estado sionista,” Instituto Brasil Palestina, July 4, 2018. Translation by Google.

Many of the elected officials from Podemos—primarily at the local level in various regions of Spain—have called for a boycott of Israeli organizations as well as Spanish companies that do business with companies in Israel, as part of a campaign called “Israeli apartheid-free zone.” Tens of local councils in Spain have also joined the campaign and have declared their commitment to boycott Israel. The local Jewish community in Spain has actively opposed the campaign and has resorted to legal means. It should be mentioned that the boycott is usually not aimed at Spain’s Jewish community, which is not particularly visible, but rather against Israel and Israelis. However, criticism of Israel, hostility toward Israel, and the use of antisemitic symbols commonly are juxtaposed. This has been particularly visible during visits by Israeli sports teams or musical groups; the cancellation of Jewish–American singer Matisyahu’s invitation to a music festival in Spain in 2015 is a prime example. The event was canceled after BDS organizations pressured the organizers

of the event that the singer declare his position on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The government of Spain condemned the decision and Matisyahu in the end performed at the festival (Beauchamp, 2015).

Podemos has two representatives in the European Parliament, Manuel Pineda and Miguel Urbán, who both have a rich history of antisemitic statements. For example, in response to a public political scandal surrounding Angela Maestro (United Left, Spain) who gave a 8,300 Euro cash “donation” to Leila Khaled, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine who had been involved in hijacking a plane to Israel, Urbán claimed on Facebook that the Zionist organizations were in collusion with conservative nationalists and were taking over Spain’s court system (see Figure 31).

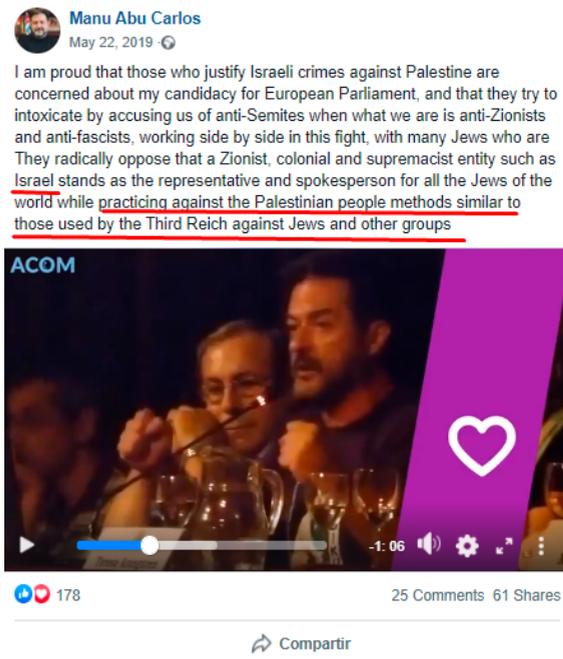
Figure 31. Antisemitic Statement by Podemos Representatives to European Parliament



Note. From Miguel Urbán, Facebook, October 17, 2019.



Note. From Manuel Pineda, Facebook, June 3, 2010.



Note. From Manuel Pineda, Facebook, May 22, 2019.

Manu Abu Carlos
May 15

On the 72nd anniversary of the Nakba, let's fight for the right of return: with Palestine always!

This May 15, 2020, marks the 72nd anniversary of the expulsion, by blood and fire, of a large part of the Palestinian people from their own land. It was a unilateral decision of the Zionist movement, a right-wing and racist ideology of Jewish sectors, which prevailed over an already unjust decision of the UN, occupying territories not foreseen in the partition plan and expelling entire Palestinian peoples, perpetrating massacres, and creating terror, initiating the policy of ethnic cleansing that seeks to cleanse the historic territory of Palestine of its ancestral inhabitants.

The Communist Party of Spain works to renew its militant commitment and solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people for their sovereignty and for international relations based on respect for international law and peace, to stop the campaign of ethnic cleansing and the violent repression of the struggle of the Palestinian people carried out by Israel for decades denying the right to existence of the Palestinians.

On May 13, Zaid Fadi Qasbi, a 14-year-old teenager, was killed by a shot in the head by an Israeli soldier near the Palestinian city of Hebron, and four of his companions were also shot, one of them seriously. Young people participated in protests over the announced annexation to the state of Israel of new lands and the legalization of Israeli settlements in the West Bank that had already been condemned and denounced by the UN. The renewed plunder of Palestinian land, the unilateral and illegal declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and the liquidation of the two-state project to satisfy Palestine's right to sovereignty, have been endorsed and encouraged by Donald Trump and the government of United States, that have made the systematic violation of international law the axis of their foreign policy. The so-called Deal of the Century, the peace plan designed by Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law turned Washington's special envoy to the Middle East, is nothing more than the deepening of the total annihilation of Palestine and the culmination of ethnic cleansing, initiated with the Nakba.

Despite the military occupation, constant oppression and frequent assassinations, the Palestinian people resist, although most of their population has suffered repression, has passed through Israeli prisons and has seen many family members die and others mutilated. However, the resistance continues, the Palestinians continue to live life, esteem their land, reaching out for a peaceful solution that will make possible the return of more than five million refugees, the release of more than five thousand prisoners, respect, on an equal footing, for their political and social rights and the democratic coexistence of people of different ethnicities, languages and religions.

The European Union condemns the violation of the rights of the Palestinian people but does not act accordingly, while imperialism and Zionism seek to impose their dictatorship on the world through their military and economic power, although the struggle of the peoples of the world will end up defeating imperialist hegemony and Zionism will become a reminder of human infamy.

The Communist Party of Spain supports and encourages the activities of movements and associations to show solidarity with the Palestinian people, in defense of a world in peace, free from the scourge of colonialism and imperialism, and based on equality and international law.

https://www.pce.es/en-el-72o-aniversario-de-la-nakba-luche...



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72° ANIVERSARIO DE LA NAKBA
LUCHEMOS POR EL DERECHO AL RETORNO:
CON PALESTINA ¡SIEMPRE!

ACE

109 5 Comments 44 Shares

Note. From Manuel Pineda, Facebook, May 15, 2020.

Antisemitism on the Political Right

Support for the extreme right has increased in recent years, following a long period of not having any representation in the Spanish parliament. The most visible example is the Vox Party, which was formed in 2013. As in the case of other populist and nationalist right-wing parties in Europe and elsewhere, the Vox Party's agenda includes opposition to both immigration and to the separatist movements in the country (Matamoros, 2018). The party is often accused of anti-Muslim rhetoric and incitement against immigrants (Walker, 2019). In the most recent elections, held in November 2019, the party won 52 seats or about 15% of the popular vote, thus becoming the third largest party in Spain's parliament. Their popularity has grown since the previous elections in April 2019 when they won 24 seats and especially

when compared to the 2015 and 2016 elections, when the party failed to gain any seats in the parliament (Hedgecoe, 2019). One of its parliamentary candidates in the April 2019 election was Fernando Paz, a Holocaust denier. Following a media uproar, Paz withdrew his candidacy, apparently due to pressure from the party's leaders (EC, 2019).

The Separatist Discourse in Spain

The quest for independence of some of the regions of Spain has been central to Spain's politics for many years. The struggle of the separatist movements in these regions that seek their independence from the central government in Madrid has, at times, relied on antisemitic messages. One example is a comment made by Benet Salellas, one of the leaders of the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), a separatist leftist party in the Catalonia region (see Figure 32). Salellas referred to the Federation of Jewish communities of Spain as "the Zionist lobby" and further explained that in his role as a public official, "as defenders of the sovereignty of this parliament, we do not agree that whoever has to decide who is received or not received [in parliament] should be foreign agents" (González, 2016). Effectively, this statement drew on an age-old antisemitic trope about the local Jewish community not being loyal to the interests of their country of citizenship, and rather being Zionist agents loyal to foreign interests (i.e., dual loyalty).

Figure 32. CUP Leader Refers to Federation of Jewish Communities as Zionist Lobby



Note. From Germán Gonzáles, “La CUP indigna a las comunidades judías [The CUP outrages the Jewish communities],” *El Mundo*, May 26, 2016.