

# Be Careful Who Your Friends Are – Anti-Semitism of the Czech “Pro-Israel” Far-right and its Security Implications

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*“Beware of flatterers, especially when they come preaching hatred” – Albert Einstein<sup>1</sup>*

*“You will know them by their fruits.” – St. Matthew<sup>2</sup>*

## Introduction

In 2010 Heinz-Christian Strache from Austria (FPÖ), German Freedom Party head Rene Stadtkewitz, Sweden Democrat MP Kent Ekeroth and Filip Dewinter as well as the head of Belgium’s Vlaams Belang party visited Israel and signed a joint statement, the so-called “Jerusalem Statement”, in which they called for the support of Israel as a Western outpost against radical Islam.<sup>3</sup> Geert Wilders stated in June of the same year that: “If Jerusalem falls into the hands of the Muslims, Athens and Rome will be next. Thus, Jerusalem is the main front protecting the West. It is not a conflict over territory but rather an ideological battle, between the mentality of the liberated West and the ideology of Islamic barbarism.”<sup>4</sup> The “Jerusalem Statement” was only a piece in the puzzle of the recent trend of the far-right’s “pro-Israel” push. Over the last two decades, Western far-right politics have become increasingly confusing to observers of Jewish and Israeli affairs.

To name just a few more examples: The Hungarian far-right party Jobbik has made several pro-Israeli proclamations and attempted to approach the Hungarian Jewry with a Hanukkah blessing, drawing sharp criticism from both the Jewish community and the far-right.<sup>5</sup> The Sweden Democrats expelled one of their members over antisemitic remarks<sup>6</sup> and attempted to participate on the Jerusalem Leaders Summit in Israel.<sup>7</sup>

1 Einstein, Albert. Why do they Hate the Jews? *Collier’s Magazine* (New York, November 26, 1938).

2 Matthew 7:15-16 (NKJV).

3 Heneghan, Tom. Europe far right courts Israel in anti-Islam drive. Reuters 20 December 2019, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-islam-far-right-idUSTRE6BJ37120101220> [cit. 11-05-2019].

4 Nahmias, Roe. Geert Wilders: Change Jordans name to Palestine. *Ynet* 20 June 2010, available at: <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3907722,00.html> [cit. 11-05-2019].

5 Marton Dunai: Hungary’s Jobbik gets double rebuff for Hannukah greetings to Jews. *Reuters*. 30 December 2016, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/uk-hungary-jobbik-hannukah-idUSKBN14J1A9> [cit. 11-05-2019].

6 Far-right Swedish party fires MP over anti-Semitism. *The Times of Israel*, 5 December 2016, available at: <http://www.timesofisrael.com/far-right-swedish-party-fires-mp-over-anti-semitism/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

7 Herb Keinon: Israeli officials won’t meet reps of far-right Swedish Party. *The Jerusalem Post*, 21 December 2016, available at: <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Government-officials-wont-meet-reps-of-far-Right-Swedish-party-476100> [cit. 11-05-2019].

Marine Le Pen of the Front National (Rassemblement National since 2018) expelled her own father and the party's founder, Jean Marie Le Pen, over antisemitic remarks<sup>8</sup> and made several pro-Israeli statements. In 2016, Hans Christian Strache, who was at the time the leader of the Austrian FPÖ, traveled to Israel on his own personal initiative and visited the Yad Vashem.<sup>9</sup> The German AfD attempted to pose as an active force against the anti-Israeli Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS) and established a dedicated Jewish section within the party, all of this amid the growing concerns about the party's ties with antisemitic scene.<sup>10</sup>

Israeli diplomacy and Jewish society as a whole struggles to find a balance between the pragmatic needs of *realpolitik* and necessary caution vis-à-vis far-right ideology. Boycotts are applied in some cases, such as against the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and Alternative for Germany (AfD),<sup>11</sup> but other right-wing populist parties and leaders, such as Hungary's Viktor Orbán or America's Steve Bannon were embraced by Benjamin Netanyahu's government. In such situations, the Jewish communities may feel caught between the hammer of domestic antisemitism and the anvil of Israeli *realpolitik*.

In the meantime, the more traditional corners of the European radical right-wing feel growing competition from movements labeled as “right-wing populist”, “new right” or “alt-lite” and seek ways to denounce them. Pro-Israel statements gave them powerful ammunition to do so by using antisemitic conspiracy theories. Already in 2009, the magazine *Das Volk in Bewegung*, linked to the German neo-Nazi party NPD, responded with a conspiracy myth accusing six of the European New Right parties of being an “Israel connection” or Israeli proxies.<sup>12</sup> Jews and Israelis are clearly not the only ones who feel perplexed over this trend.

In order to navigate ourselves in this confusing situation and to formulate our policy vis-à-vis “pro-Israel” right-wing populism, we have to dig deeper into its individual personal motivations and ideological core in order to understand both the sources and possible limits of its “philosemitic” manifestations. This chapter attempts to do so by using the Czech Republic as a case-study. It provides a description of the

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8 French National Front expels founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, *BBC News*. 20 August 2015, available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34009901> [cit. 11-05-2019].

9 Baker, Luke: Far-right Austrian leader visits Israel's Holocaust memorial. *Times of Israel* 12 April 2016, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-austria-strache/far-right-austrian-leader-visits-israels-holocaust-memorial-idUSKCN0X91NX> [cit. 11-05-2019].

10 Oltermann, Philip. German parliament declares Israel boycott campaign antisemitic, *The Guardian* 17.5.2019, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/17/german-parliament-declares-israel-boycott-campaign-antisemitic> [cit. 11-05-2019].

11 Israel hält an FPÖ-Boycott fest: “Das ist keine Marotte”, *Der Standard*, December 4, 2018, available at: <https://derstandard.at/2000093084566/Israel-haelt-an-FPOe-Boycott-fest-Das-ist-keine-Marotte> [cit. 11-05-2019].

12 Die “Israel Connection”. *Volk in Bewegung* 1/2009. See also: Tarant, Z.: “Friends or Foes? Attitudes of the Czech Antisemitic Scene towards Islam and Muslims” In: Small, Charles Asher: *The ISGAP Papers – Antisemitism in Comparative Perspective*, vol. 3(2018). (Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy: New York 2018), p. 257-278. For the current version of the conspiracist myth on a far-right encyclopedia see: Israel-Connection, *Jew-Wiki* [https://www.jewiki.net/wiki/Israel-Connection#cite\\_ref-11](https://www.jewiki.net/wiki/Israel-Connection#cite_ref-11) [cit. 11-05-2019].

paradoxical relationship between the Czech right-wing populist scene and Jewish affairs. It investigates the ideological background of these parties and movements, explaining the rationale behind some of the paradoxes. I discuss the implications and possible challenges of the right-wing populist policies for the security and well-being of the Jewish communities in the country and I claim that our confusion over the “pro-Israel” far-right stems from our misunderstanding of the far-right’s thought and political strategy. For the far-right itself, there may be no perception of conflict between antisemitic conspiracism and “pro-Israel” manifestations.

## **Ethnopluralism and its Mainstreaming**

To understand the logic behind the dual attitudes of the far-right *vis-à-vis* Israel and the Jews, we first have to consider the possibility that there is simply no logic here at all. Political science often tends to over-theorize things and may impose its theories and ideological labels on movements that do not adhere to any of that theory in the first place. Before one jumps into complex theoretical considerations, Occam’s razor requires us first to explore the most straightforward option. When studying political culture, one can either focus on ideological concepts, or on individual personalities. This is a typical debate between the approach of political science and anthropology; however, for the purposes of this study, we actually have to combine the two. There are cases in which personal disagreements within the parties are higher than across party lines. As I will document below, one party may have both philosemitic and antisemitic members. Due to the lack of clear policy on such matters, indifference of the leadership or internal personal dynamics and power struggles, the party may be either unable or unwilling to deal with such cases without any underlying ideology that could be used to comprehensively explain those cases.

Yet, some movements actually do have structured ideology in which seemingly conflicting statements make sense to them. The most important of such ideological constructs would be “ethnopluralism”. Coined by the theorist of body culture and far-right environmentalism Henning Eichberg in 1973, the term ethnopluralism was later adopted by the French far-right political philosopher Alain de Benoist as part of the *Nouvelle Droite* (“New Right”) ideological concept.<sup>13</sup> Ethnopluralism calls for “right to difference” by means of “diversity on the global scale”, yet “preservation of ethnic homogeneity on the regional level” as a necessity for maintaining this global diversity. In effect, all ethnic groups are seen as nominally equal, according to this ideology, as long as they remain in their native region or territory. One culture has no right to interfere in the affairs of another culture and should refrain from imposing its cultural norms on that other culture. The “right to difference” is granted only on the national and territorial level, not on the level of the individual.

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13 Teitelbaum, Benjamin R.: *Lions of the North: Sounds of the New Nordic Radical Nationalism* (Oxford University Press 2017), p. 180-181, n. 23.

Ethnopluralism is often offered by its supporters as an alternative to models of liberal multiculturalism. On the surface, it may even sound reasonable to some, but as the proverb goes, “the devil is in the details”. While appealing in theory, ethnopluralism denies the right of religious, ethnic or national minorities to exist and live side-by side with the majority population. That is because in order to achieve a full homogeneity on the local level, somebody has to physically (re)move the non-homogeneous members of the society. Language that imitates multiculturalism is thus used for the defense of a potentially genocidal far-right ideology. Comparison with the older far-right and völkish concepts, such as Blood and Soil (*Blut und Boden*) and Aryan Living Space (*Lebensraum*) is also very revealing in this context.

For the purpose of this study, let us focus on some of the paradoxical outcomes of ethnopluralism, namely in the far-right’s attitudes toward Muslims and Jews. In effect, ethnopluralism calls for different attitudes towards an ethnic or national group depending on the group’s location. According to its theory, any national or ethnic group may be tolerated or even admired as long as it stays on its own territory. Muslims are thus seen as a threat on European soil, yet as a natural, native population in the Middle East by ethnopluralists. The very same and admired Muslim stubbornness in maintaining their religious and cultural identity in the Muslim world is seen as a threat on European soil. Practices that are considered unacceptable on European soil, such as ritual slaughters or circumcision, are to be tolerated by ethnopluralists as long as they take place outside the “living space” of the Europeans.

One can even find a polemic with islamophobia from ethnopluralist positions. In his response to the wave of solidarity after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, Alan de Benoist himself called Islamophobes “useful idiots of the Islamists”.<sup>14</sup> In a similar fashion, a Czech neo-Nazi thinker, Stanislav Beer, wrote that the “Criticism of Islamization of Central Europe should not contain primitive insults of domestic Islamic culture”<sup>15</sup> Content analysis of neo-Nazi and other far-right websites in Czechia has revealed a highly ambivalent attitude in which the criticism of Muslim immigration contrasts with admiration of specific political regimes (Syria, Iran), movements (Hizballah) and ideologies (al-Assad’s Baathism, Ghaddafi’s *Jamaharyia*) in the Muslim world.<sup>16</sup>

Ethnopluralist ambivalence seems somewhat less visible in relationship to the Jews, especially due to the complex overlaps and combinations of ethnopluralism with other ideological elements. An exemplary case of ethnopluralist policy vis-à-vis the Jews in Western Europe would be the Front National in France, which on the one hand

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14 Gauthier, Nicolas. Les islamophobes sont les idiots utiles de l’islamisme radical. *Boulevard Voltaire* 18 January 2015, available at: <https://www.bvoltaire.fr/les-islamophobes-sont-les-idiots-utiles-de-lislamisme-radical/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

15 Beer, Stanislav. Diskuse: Ke kritice islamizace střední Evropy zásadně nepatří primitivní urážky domácí islámské kultury. *Náš směr* 13 March 2010, available at: <http://nassmer.blogspot.cz/2010/03/diskuse-ke-kritice-islamizace-stredni.html> [cit. 11-05-2019].

16 Tarant, Zbyněk: “Friends or Foes? Attitudes of the Czech Antisemitic Scene towards Islam and Muslims” In: Small, Charles Asher: *The ISGAP Papers – Antisemitism in Comparative Perspective*, vol. 3(2018). (Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy: New York 2018), p. 257-278.

officially supports Israel, but also calls for the banning of ritual slaughter<sup>17</sup> or limiting the possibility of dual citizenship only to EU member states<sup>18</sup> – both of which are seen as policies harmful to Jewish life in France.

Unfortunately, none of the parties dealt with in the following text have ever mentioned the term “ethnopluralism”. While the term is a frequent topic among more intellectual circles of the neo-Nazi scene, Czech right-wing populists talk about ideological concepts only rarely. The term would fit perfectly for the practical outcomes of their policies, but there is simply not enough data to decide whether we are truly dealing with conscious applications of ethnopluralist policy or simply populist responses to naturally occurring nativism that is typical for post-communist Central European nations.

## **Ethnopluralism and Radical Atheism – The Case of “We do not Want Islam in the Czech Republic”**

Ethnopluralism does not have to be the only source of ambivalence in far-right policies vis-à-vis the Jews. In some cases, it may intersect with other ideologies such as radical atheism. In the Czech Republic, this would be the case of Martin Konvička, who in 2012 founded the popular Czech anti-Muslim Facebook group “We Do Not Want Islam in the Czech Republic,” (*Islám v ČR nechceme*, IVČRN). In Konvička’s interview with the activist photographer Vít Hassan, the issue of *halal* slaughters came up and, when confronted with the fact that Jewish ritual slaughter is in essence similar to the Muslim custom, Konvička argued:

We have animal protection laws which basically ban these two kinds of slaughter. At the same time, there is a ritual reason for allowing Halal and Kosher slaughters to take place. Personally, I would ban both. In short, both of these rituals come from some early Iron Age. Either society decides to protect animals from unnecessary suffering and in that case, let us be strict, or we decide to prefer Iron Age rituals. And I really do not care about some Iron Age rituals.<sup>19</sup>

Konvička is an entomologist by profession and his ideological concepts draw more inspiration from evolutionary biology, radical atheism and Richard Dawkins’ Meme Theory than from Alan de Benoist’s *Nouvelle Droite*. In one of his blog posts, which walks the thin line between evolutionary biology and social Darwinism, Konvička

17 Marine Le Pen: Ban halal and all ritual slaughter. *The Times of Israel* 25 April 2017, available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/marine-le-pen-ban-halal-and-all-ritual-slaughter/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

18 French Israelis fume at Le Pen’s plan to ban dual citizenship. *The Times of Israel* 10 February 2017, available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/french-israelis-fume-at-le-pens-plan-to-ban-dual-citizenship/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

19 Hassan, Vít: Výbušný maxirozhovor s Martinem Konvičkou. *Vít Hassan’s blog at iDnes.cz*. 6.10.2016, available at: <https://hassan.blog.idnes.cz/blog.aspx?c=557376> [cit. 11-05-2019].

exploits Dawkins' radical atheism against Islam, claiming that a biologist is more qualified to understand Islam than an Orientalist.<sup>20</sup> His applications of the same concepts to Judaism, however, can be somewhat reminiscent of what the Germans call Enlightenment antisemitism (*Aufklärungs-antisemitismus*) by attacking the Jews for their alleged “medieval” and “obsolete” rituals. This goes against the otherwise supportive rhetoric vis-à-vis Israel and Zionism, either on IVČRN<sup>21</sup> websites or in a dedicated section called “Israel News” on the website *Nová buržoazie* (New Bourgeoisie), founded and run by Konvička. The website contains multiple statements praising Israel of its perceived nationalist ethos. In response to the debate over Israeli Nationality Law in the summer of 2018, for example, Konvička's *New Bourgeoisie* wrote:

The state of Israel is a Jewish state, refined by the Jewish nation, where Jewish identity has survived for thousands of years under oppression by Egyptians, Babylonians, Romans, Arabs, Ottomans and British; under attacks by Muslims. Now, this nation state, hardened by thousands of painful experiences, has decided that it is not going to make concessions to the international Islamo-fascist lobby of the EU, nor to the fifth column of Arab chauvinists and antisemitic neo-Marxist Jews within Israel itself...<sup>22</sup>

The quotation comes from an article: “*Israel – A Country Where the Minority does not Dictate the Majority*”. Here, we can see ethnopluralist duality in action – Israel is admired as a state that maintains its Jewish religious and national identity. However, as a minority in the Czech Republic, Jewish religious practices important for maintaining that identity would be seen as a problem. Konvička was explicit about the pragmatic, *quid pro quo* nature of his movement's attitude toward the Jews: “*Again, I have to very seriously repeat that it is sometimes important to make opportunistic friends. I of course count Israel and Jews as opportunist friends. The Jewish boys, however, should finally understand that if we are to defend ourselves against our common enemy, we may have to sacrifice something.*”<sup>23</sup> The common enemy was in this case Islam. The website of IVČRN has published more than two hundred remarks about Israel, the majority of them depicting Israel as an embattled enclave of Western civilization surrounded by murderous Muslims. Examples include: “*IVČRN stands for the Jews and Israel,*”<sup>24</sup> or “*Palestinian Muslims routinely murdering Israelis.*”<sup>25</sup> However, the idea of a pragmatic

20 Konvička, Martin: Proč biolog či ekolog pochopí islám snáze, než orientalista. *Parlamentní listy* 15.02.2016, available at: <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/profil/Doc-Martin-Konvicka-Ph-D-104562/clanek/Proc-biolog-ci-ekolog-pochopi-islam-snaze-nez-orientalista-67367> [cit. 11-05-2019].

21 Ať žije Izrael. *Islám v ČR nechceme*, December 11, 2017, available at: <https://www.ivcrn.cz/at-zije-izrael/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

22 Izrael – stát, kde menšina nediktuje většině! *Nová buržoazie*, June 21, 2018, Available at: <http://www.novaburzoazie.com/438747882/6280553/posting/izrael-news-izrael-stat-kde-menšina-nediktuje-většině> [cit. 11-05-2019].

23 Hassan, Vít: Výbušný maxirozhovor s Martinem Konvičkou. *Vít Hassan's blog at iDnes.cz*. 6.10.2016, available at: <https://hassan.blog.idnes.cz/blog.aspx?c=557376> [cit. 11-05-2019].

24 IVČRN stojí za Židy a Izraelem, *IVČRN*, June 23, 2015, available at: <https://www.ivcrn.cz/ivcrn-stoji-za-zidy-a-izraelem/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

25 Palestínští muslimové vraždí v Izraeli Židy jak na běžícím pásu, *IVČRN*, November 9, 2015, available at: <https://www.ivcrn.cz/palestinští-muslimové-vraždí-v-izraeli-zidy-jak-na-bežícím-pásu/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

alliance against a common enemy reaches even further, such as in the case of the anti-Soros campaigns. Under the title: “George Soros: Unscrupulous, unelected, yet influential politician,” IVČRN voiced its support for Viktor Orbán’s anti-Soros campaigns and quoted the Israeli government’s rebuttal of the antisemitism concerns.<sup>26</sup> In a later piece, titled “*Jews against Soros*”, the affiliated website *New Bourgeoisie* explains:

It is necessary for Central and Eastern Europe and for everyone who stands against Soros to understand that just because Israel is a Jewish state, it is not Soros’s state. Quite the contrary, it is a fortress that has not yet been conquered by Soros and which stands on our side against his destructive influence. It proves this by its unrelenting alliance with Hungary in the fight against Soros.<sup>27</sup>

Martin Konvička never came to implement any of his political beliefs into a practical policy. His grassroots anti-Muslim movement, despite its popularity on Facebook, failed to transform itself into a standard political party. This is partly due to political naivety and the psychological traits of Konvička himself, and partly due to factionalism, personal conflicts and power struggles within the movement. Neo-Nazis and other parts of the more traditional far-right cited Konvička’s pro-Israel statements for purposes of denunciation. Konvička, who is not Jewish, was displayed as an ultra-orthodox Jew in far-right cartoons<sup>28</sup> and Czech neo-Nazi publisher Stanislav Beer wrote: “The disseminators of world conflicts want to kill the European spirit and people like Mr. Konvička are their most devoted servants”.<sup>29</sup> Konvička’s radical atheism may have also contributed to its conflicts with other sectors within the far-right scene, which see the Christian religion as a part of national identity.

IVČRN continues to exist as a civic association and most of its activity takes place online. The close circle of Konvička’s most loyal followers continue to gather in the streets under the banner of *Bloc against Islamization*, often joining rallies and events organized by other more radical far-right groups, including neo-Nazis (Workers’ Party) and fascists (National Democracy).<sup>30</sup> Konvička himself has registered about five or six different party titles and their respective online domains (*New Bourgeoisie*, *Seventh Republic*, *Alternative for Czech Republic*, *Alt-Right.cz* and others), possibly hoping that one of these banners might grant him his great comeback. His rallies, often taking the

26 George Soros, bezskrupulózní, nikým nevolený a přesto vlivný politik, IVČRN, June 11, available at: <https://www.ivcrn.cz/george-soros-bezskrupulozni-nikym-nevoleny-a-presto-vlivny-politik/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

27 Židé proti Sorosovi! *Nová buržoazie*, November 1, 2018, available at: <http://www.novaburzoazie.com/438747882/6677258/posting/izrael-news-židé-proti-sorosovi> [cit. 11-05-2019].

28 Seidelmeier, Axel. Okurky – ty já rád. *Deliandiver*, 24.08.2016, available at: <http://deliandiver.org/2016/08/okurky-ty-ja-rad.html> [cit. 11-05-2019].

29 “‘Deislamizátor’ a vyznavač rasového promíšení debatuje s arabistou o hrozbě islámu”. *Náš směr*, February 23, 2014, available at: <http://www.nassmer.blogspot.cz/2014/02/deislamizator-vyznavac-rasoveho.html> [cit. 11-05-2019].

30 Personal observation – joint rallies of the Workers’ Party, National Democracy and Bloc against Islam: May 1, 2018 in Pilsen and April 2, 2017 in Rokycany.

form of intentional farces or mystifications, manage to attract the attention of the media. In some cases, such as the “staged takeover of Prague by ISIS” in 2016, which caused panic among foreign tourists, this comes at the price of public order.<sup>31</sup>

## **Ideologies or Individuals? – The Case of “Freedom and Direct Democracy”**

Where Konvička’s movement failed, the right-wing populist political party *Freedom and Direct Democracy* managed to succeed. Established in 2015, it was the second attempt of its founder, the Czech-Japanese businessman Tomio Okamura, to enter high politics under the banner of right-wing populism. His previous attempt, called *Dawn of Direct Democracy* (*Úsvit přímé demokracie*), failed due to internal power struggles and budgetary issues. Its Czech title *Svoboda a přímá demokracie* is often abbreviated as SPD and is not to be mistaken with the German Social Democratic Party. In the November 2017 elections, the party received more than 10 percent of votes and claimed 22 seats in parliament following a divisive political campaign based on securitization of the Refugee Crisis.<sup>32</sup> The party is traditionally described as “right-wing populist”, although surveys of election dynamics show that most of the party’s supporters were recruited from the ranks of former voters of the conservative left-wing, namely the Communists and Social Democrats.<sup>33</sup>

The Czech SPD nominally holds pro-Israeli positions, for example by calling for recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.<sup>34</sup> During the Gaza escalation in spring of 2019, Okamura supported what he called “the Israeli right to self-defense”.<sup>35</sup> He and his party strongly criticize Palestinian terror attacks and use Israel as an ideal of a confident ethnic state, capable of defending its own national borders. The Jewish state is mentioned in more than 270 of the party’s statements, the majority of which are supportive. The party also calls for Holocaust remembrance, especially when it allows it to bash contemporary Germany,<sup>36</sup> and has openly criticized manifestations of

31 Lidé vyděšení Konvičkovým divadlem v panice prchali do restaurace, *iDnes.cz*, August 22, 2016, available at: [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/video-panika-v-restauraci-na-staromestskem-namesti.A160822\\_223634\\_domaci\\_jkk](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/video-panika-v-restauraci-na-staromestskem-namesti.A160822_223634_domaci_jkk) [cit. 11-05-2019].

32 “Elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic held on 20 – 21 October 2017,” *Czech Statistical Office*, available at: <https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2017nss/ps53?xjazyk=EN&xv=1> [cit. 11-05-2019].

33 Babiš a Okamura vysáli levici, od TOP 09 se přebíhalo k ODS, míní analytik. *iDnes.cz*, October 23, 2017m available at: [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/presuny-hlasu-volici-strany-volby-2017-ekologiccka-inference.A171023\\_153934\\_domaci\\_ale](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/presuny-hlasu-volici-strany-volby-2017-ekologiccka-inference.A171023_153934_domaci_ale) [cit. 11-05-2019].

34 “SPD nepřímou podpořila Zemana. Hnutí se vyslovilo pro přesun ambasády do Jeruzaléma,” *Euro.cz* December 9, 2017, accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.euro.cz/politika/spd-neprimo-podporila-zemana-hnuti-se-vyslovilo-pro-presun-ambasady-do-jeruzalema-1386006> [cit. 11-05-2019].

35 Tomio Okamura: Odsuzují terorismus Palestinců. Izrael má právo na sebeobranu, *Svoboda a přímá demokracie*, May 7, 2015, available at: <https://www.spd.cz/novinky/4782-tomio-okamura-odsuzuji-terorismus-palestincu-izrael-ma-pravo-na-sebeobranu> [cit. 11-05-2019].

36 Radim Fiala: 27. ledna je Mezinárodní den památky obětí holocaustu, kdy si připomínáme zřůdnou genocidu Židů, za kterou jsou zodpovědní nacističtí Němci, *Svoboda a přímá demokracie*, January 27, 2019, available



antisemitism during the 2017 dispute over restoration of the Jewish cemetery in Prostějov.<sup>37</sup> The local civic association *Hanakian Jerusalem* (Hanakia or Haná being the Central part of Moravia), which strives for restoration of the Moravian Jewish heritage, is led by SPD member Jana Gáborová,<sup>38</sup> who also openly criticized some of the antisemitic incidents within the party.<sup>39</sup> The SPD feels offended by any comparisons between antisemitism and islamophobia, calling them the “relativization of antisemitism”. In a response to a comparison between anti-refugee and anti-Jewish sentiments drawn by a Czech historian, the vice-chairman of the party wrote:

The Jews have always belonged to the educated groups in society that have always managed to take care of themselves without the help of others. In no European country have Jews ever attacked the local population, nor have they raped women and girls. Things such as honor killing, female circumcision or imposing their own rituals on the majority society never had a place in the Jewish community [...] The fear of Jews and the fear of Muslims are two different things. [...] SPD has to voice its loud objection against such a flagrant relativization made by Mr. Frankl [the criticized historian]. By doing so, he equalizes the suffering of the Jews in concentration camps to cases in which someone criticizes Muslims and Islam on social networks and public space, even if they do so harshly.<sup>40</sup>

In this and other examples, we can see clear philosemitic statements. However, at the same time, portions of the party’s membership and leadership base are deeply rooted in the conservative pro-Kremlin conspiracist scene and there have been multiple antisemitic incidents linked to the party. On November 10, 2017, SPD member and MP Jaroslav Staník was heard voicing his desire to “gas the gays, Jews and Romas right after birth”. The party first denied that such remarks ever took place, but later expelled Staník from all posts.<sup>41</sup> Tomio Okamura and Martin Rozner have voiced opinions paramount to denial of the Nazi genocide of Romanies by trying to downplay the atrocities of the WWII internment camp for Romanies in Lety u Písku.<sup>42</sup> Their remarks

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at: <https://www.spd.cz/novinky/3872-radim-fiala-27-ledna-je-mezinarodni-den-pamatky-obeti-holocaustu-kdy-si-pripominame-zrudnou-genocidu-zidu-za-ktou-je-zodpovedni-nacisticti-nemci> [cit. 11-05-2019].

37 Předseda programové komise: O jednom prostějovském „židákovi“, *Svoboda a přímá demokracie*, January 16, 2017, available at: <https://www.spd.cz/novinky/predseda-programove-komise-o-jednom-prostejovskem-zidakovi> [cit. 11-05-2019].

38 *Hanácký Jeruzalém*, available at: <http://hanackyjeruzalem.cz> [cit. 11-05-2019].

39 Vojtěch Berger. Radní ČTK za Okamurovce: Semín, i když je navržený za SPD, by neměl agenturu kontrolovat. *Hlídací pes*, June 13, 2019, available at: <https://hlidacipes.org/radni-ctk-za-okamurovce-semin-i-kdyz-je-navrzeny-za-spd-by-nemel-agenturu-kontrolovat/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

40 Radim Fiala: Srovnání historika Michala Frankla kulhá na obě nohy. Muslimy nelze s Evropany židovského původu srovnávat. *Svoboda a přímá demokracie*, January 7, 2019, available at: <https://www.spd.cz/novinky/3716-radim-fiala-srovnani-historika-michala-frankla-kulha-na-obe-nohy-muslimy-nelze-s-evropany-zidovskeho-puvodu-srovnavat> [cit. 11-05-2019].

41 “Střilet po narození. Tajemník SPD urážel ve sněmovně gaye, Židy a Romy, tvrdí Marksová a Černoč,” *iRozhlas*, November 10, 2017, accessed February 12, 2018, [https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/strilet-po-narozeni-tajemnik-spd-urazel-ve-snemovne-gaye-zidy-a-romy-tvrdi\\_1711101320\\_kro](https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/strilet-po-narozeni-tajemnik-spd-urazel-ve-snemovne-gaye-zidy-a-romy-tvrdi_1711101320_kro) [cit. 11-05-2019].

42 Tábor v Letech je neexistující pseudokoncentrák, tvrdí Rozner z SPD. Omluvu po Okamurovi chce i židovská obec, *iHned*, February 5, 2018, available at: <https://domaci.ihned.cz/c1-66039630-tabor-v-letech-je-neexistujici-pseudokoncentrak-tvrdi-rozner-z-spd-omluvu-po-okamurovi-chce-i-zidovska-obec> [cit. 11-05-2019].

led to a criminal investigation, as genocide denial is a crime according to Section 405 of the Czech Criminal Code. The incident also drew sharp criticism from the Jewish community, which is concerned about any attempt to mainstream genocide denial, be it the *Holocaust* or the *Porajmos*.<sup>43</sup>

There is indeed good reason for such concern. The SPD uses its influence to disrupt and delay implementation of anti-extremism strategies due to their objections to the party being mentioned among extremist movements.<sup>44</sup> Where the official websites of the party call for defense of Jews and support of Israel, its Members of Parliament (MPs) such as Radek Koten share conspiracy theories such as “Chemtrails”, “Illuminati”, “New World Order” or “vaccination conspiracy” on their social media accounts.<sup>45</sup> Signs referring to “NWO” – an acronym for the “New World Order” antisemitic conspiracist myth – have appeared at the party’s rallies. Okamura himself gave several speeches at rallies of the outspoken antisemitic party *National Democracy* (Národní demokracie, ND), where antisemitic pamphlets were distributed.<sup>46</sup> He is a frequent guest on the *Studio Beta* program of the conspiracist, “alternative” radio station *Free Radio*, also notorious for its serialization of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.<sup>47</sup>

Unlike the IVČRN, where clear statements explaining the confusing attitudes to Israel and Jews can be found, the SPD seems to have no clear policy in place. None, at least, was found in this study. This party seems to be a case in which individual differences are more important than theoretical and ideological concepts. It is not clear what causes the party to promote candidates with conspiracist (and even antisemitic) backgrounds for prominent political posts. Affinity to the pro-Kremlin, “alternative” scene could be the factor here, but the scene is, unfortunately, swarming with antisemitic conspiracist theories and their authors. People who would be dismissed as “conspiracist crooks” with little to no education or experience suddenly achieve positions of power. Knowingly or not, the party gives significant leverage to otherwise fringe individuals by putting them into positions from which they can further influence public discourse or disrupt the proper functioning of state institutions, including security services, state broadcasting agencies or education.

43 Dopis nezabral. Okamurovi nevěříme, za Lety ať se omluví Romům, vzkazuje Židovská obec, *Lidovky.cz*, February 15, 2018, available at: [https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/okamurovi-neduverujeme-za-lety-at-se-omluvi-romum-vzkazuji-prazsti-zide.A180214\\_122912\\_In\\_domov\\_jho](https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/okamurovi-neduverujeme-za-lety-at-se-omluvi-romum-vzkazuji-prazsti-zide.A180214_122912_In_domov_jho) [cit. 11-05-2019].

44 Vnitro čeká s vydáním zprávy o extremismu. SPD je občas radikálnější než extremisté, píše se v ní. *Lidovky.cz* May 30, 2018, available at: [https://www.lidovky.cz/vnitro-ceka-s-vydanim-zpravy-o-extremismu-spd-je-obcas-radikalnejsi-nez-extremiste-ge4/zpravy-domov.aspx?c=A180530\\_131250\\_In\\_domov\\_rsa](https://www.lidovky.cz/vnitro-ceka-s-vydanim-zpravy-o-extremismu-spd-je-obcas-radikalnejsi-nez-extremiste-ge4/zpravy-domov.aspx?c=A180530_131250_In_domov_rsa) [cit. 11-05-2019].

45 Jakub Zelenka: Podívali jsme se pod ruce Okamurových poslanců. Jejich stopa je dlouhá. A Rusko je opravdový přítel [We Looked Under the Hands of Okamura’s MPs. They Leave a Long Trail and See Russia as a True Friend] *Aktuálně.cz* October 30, 2017, accessed February 12, 2018, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/chteji-z-eu-i-nato-a-fandi-putinovi-seznamte-se-s-okamurovym/r~e979ebb8bb2111e7811f002590604f2e/>.

46 Personal observations. Rally of *National Democracy*, September 8, 2015, Wenceslas Sq., Prague; Rally of *Freedom and Direct Democracy*, November 17, 2015, Wenceslas Sq., Prague.

47 Protokoly síónských mudrců, *Svobodné rádio*, December 26, 2016, available at: <http://svobodne-radio.cz/2016-12-26-studio-beta-protokoly-sionskych-mudrcu-i-dil/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

Radek Koten, the party's MP who is known for having shared conspiracy theories about microwave ovens from pro-Russian websites on his social media accounts,<sup>48</sup> was thus elected to preside over the Security Committee of the Chamber of Deputies. In the 2019 elections to the European Parliament, SPD nominated a former health minister and chairman of the psychiatric hospital in Bohnice, Ivan David, who happens to be a founder and editor of the antisemitic website *Nová republika (New Republic)*, as its election leader. In May 2019, SPD recommended an ultra-conservative Catholic activist Michal Semín for the Executive Board of the Czech Press Agency (*Česká tisková kancelář, ČTK*). Semín, whose only experience with journalism consists of editorship of an ultra-conservative Catholic bulletin *Te Deum* and writing a personal blog, was at the time notorious for his anti-Jewish remarks,<sup>49</sup> which included traditional Catholic anti-Judaism,<sup>50</sup> beliefs in international Masonic conspiracy, or fake citations from the Talmud<sup>51</sup> copied from a website of a 19th century antisemitic pamphlet.<sup>52</sup> In one of his recent interviews, Semín expressed an opinion that the official version of 9/11 was a “farce”. He accused Israel of having benefited from the post-9/11 situation and American neoconservatives “with regard to their majority ethnic composition” of using the War on Terror for the benefits of Israel.<sup>53</sup>

The confusing complexity of SPD's relationship with Jewish affairs and WWII memory might resemble the German *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* in many aspects.<sup>54</sup> After all, the Czech SPD, as well as other European right-wing populist parties, sees the German AfD as an example to be followed. To date, the party has published almost seventy public announcements expressing sympathies to the German

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- 48 Koten z SPD žádá o prověrku. Nový šéf bezpečnostního výboru má problémy kvůli šíření dezinformací, *Aktuálně.cz*, November 29, 2017, available at: <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/poslanec-spd-koten-si-necha-udelat-bezpecnostni-proverku-pro/r~e727dc2ed52211e7ad1e0cc47ab5f122/> [cit. 11-05-2019].
- 49 Tarant, Zbyněk. From Philosemitism to Antisemitism – A Case Study of the ‘Mladá Právce’ Movement in the Czech Republic. In: Tarant, Zbyněk – Tydlitátová, Věra et al.: *Faces of Hatred Contemporary Antisemitism in its Historical Context* (Pilsen, University of West Bohemia 2013), p. 131. See also: Do Rady ČTK kandiduje i antisemita Michal Semín. *Manipulátoři.cz* 12.5.2019, available at: <https://manipulatori.cz/do-rady-ctk-kandiduje-i-antisemita-michal-semin/?fbclid=IwAR13KaUzVopMXJqVSnM0p1ihEdJJFoyWtW-csxsBY6CT-VA9auT9itE8AZA> [cit. 11-05-2019].
- 50 Semín, Michal. Zápas o duše nabírá na intenzitě, *Katolík revue* October 24, 2005, available at: [http://katolikrevue.ath.cx/fronda/zapas\\_o\\_duse\\_nabira\\_na\\_intenzite\\_michal\\_semin.htm](http://katolikrevue.ath.cx/fronda/zapas_o_duse_nabira_na_intenzite_michal_semin.htm) [cit. 11-05-2019]. See: Tydlitátová, Věra. *E-Antisemitismus – Projevy antisemitismu na českém internetu po roce 1989* (Pilsen: University of West Bohemia 2013), p. 55-57.
- 51 Semín, Michal: Pravda o Talmudu. *Eportál* 12 August 2008, available at: <https://www.euportal.cz/Articles/859-pravda-o-talmudu.aspx>
- 52 Original source of Semín's citations: Hoffman, Michael A.: Truth about the Talmud: Racist, Rabbinic Hate Literature. *RevisionistHistory.org*, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20110217172315/http://www.revisionisthistory.org/talmudtruth.html> [cit. 11-05-2019].
- 53 Americké elity připravily útok 11. září, bin Ládin je vynález USA. Řeznice Albrightová a mrtvé děti. S Clintonovou přijde globální válka. Znalec Ameriky varuje, September 6, 2016, *Parlamentní listy*, available at: <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Americke-elity-pripravily-utok-11-zari-bin-Ladin-je-vynalez-USA-Reznice-Albrightova-a-mrtve-deti-S-Clintonovou-prijde-globalni-valka-Znalec-Ameriky-varuje-452319> [cit. 11-05-2019].
- 54 Compare: “AfD provokes outcry in Germany with launch of Jewish group,” *The Guardian*, October 7, 2018, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/07/germanys-afd-sparks-outcry-with-launch-of-jewish-group> [cit. 11-05-2019].

AfD and calls for the establishment of direct contacts with AfD and other Western European right-wing populist movements.<sup>55</sup> From 2016 to 2019, one could witness the silent competition between Czech far-right parties over who would establish contacts with Marine Le Pen. In April 2019, the SPD was able to claim a victory in this race after having organized a large rally on Wenceslas Square in Prague, where Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders and other prominent figures of European right-wing populism manifested their support for SPD's election leader, Ivan David, and their willingness to cooperate with it in the European parliament.<sup>56</sup> This came after multiple joint appearances of Tomio Okamura in the public with Le Pen and Wilders, such as in December 2017.<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, the nationalist nature of these parties might complicate any cooperation in practical matters, such as when the Front National voted against the bill to ban the dual quality of consumer goods, which was proposed by the new EU member states in response to multiple revelations about vast differences in quality of food or hygienic products sold under the same brand to Western and Eastern European consumers.<sup>58</sup>

## Arsonists and Firefighters

The Czech railways saw two suspicious train accidents in July 2017. In both cases, trees were cut down to block the railway tracks with a clear intent to cause an accident. Thanks to the quick reactions of the train drivers, no one was injured in either of the two accidents, although experts have noted that there could have theoretically been dozens of casualties.<sup>59</sup> The police found handwritten notes in broken Czech and Arabic on the crime scene, allegedly citing jihadist motives to these attacks. Further investigation, however, revealed that the perpetrator was a member and staunch supporter of *Freedom and Direct Democracy*, who hoped to increase public fear of Islam. According to the investigators, the seventy-one-year-old perpetrator, Jaromír Balda, nicknamed by the press as “The First Czech Terrorist”, had exchanged several thousand short text messages with the regional SPD leader Lada Hrádková and was active in organizing the party's events. Balda was sentenced to four years in prison for terrorism and additional treatment in a psychiatric hospital.<sup>60</sup>

55 “Search Results for ‘AfD’” *Svoboda a přímá demokracie* [Freedom and Direct Democracy], accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.spd.cz/hledat/AfD>.

56 Personal observation. SPD rally in Prague, April 25, 2019.

57 Tomio Okamura: Tomio, Marine Le pen a Geert Wilders, December 17, 2017, *Svoboda a přímá demokracie*, available at: <https://www.spd.cz/novinky/tomio-okamura-tomio-marine-le-pen-a-geert-wilders> [cit. 11-05-2019].

58 Consumer product quality: Parliament takes aim at dual standards, *European Parliament News* 13 September 2018, available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20180907IPR12460/consumer-product-quality-parliament-takes-aim-at-dual-standards> [cit. 11-05-2019].

59 Policie srážku vlaku se stromem šetří jako obecné ohrožení. Pachatelé hrozí osm let, *Aktuálně.cz*, June 2, 2017, available at: <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/teroristicky-utok-na-mladoboleslavsku-policie-srazku-vlak-u-s-r-90aff974477611e7886d002590604f2e/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

60 “‘První český terorista’ dostal za pokácení stromů na koleje čtyři roky,” *Aktuálně.cz*, January 14, 2019, accessed February 12, 2018, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/senior-si-za-pokaceni-stromu-na-koleje-madopykat-ctyri-roky/r-1fa8571817da11e9beedac1f6b220ee8/> [cit. 11-05-2019].

This is the broken logic of the “firefighter arsonist”, in which a false-flag terrorist attack is staged so that the perpetrator (be it an individual or a political movement) can prove his worthiness in dealing with it. It may in part be a result of the paradox of the “Refugee Crisis without Refugees” that has left the far-right populist parties in the Czech Republic with a sort of “terrorism envy”. This was manifested in various provocations, such as Konvička’s above-mentioned gatherings, which included public desecrations of Muslim religious symbols or provocative parodies of ISIS, which were so faithful that they caused panic among foreign tourists in Prague. False-flag terrorism is not a theoretical concept for political movements with conspiracist links or backgrounds. It is, after all, their core narrative for 9/11 or Pearl Harbor. The concern is that a Jewish community could become the next target of false-flag terrorism. Several cases of pro-Kremlin groups staging fake attacks against community institutions have already been reported from Eastern Europe. Members of the German AfD are suspected by the German Federal Intelligence Service (BfV) of having cooperated with the Polish Falanga in an attack against the Hungarian Community center in Ushorod, Ukraine, in order to destabilize inter-communal relations in the country.<sup>61</sup> Alleged antisemitic incidents were also used by the Russian Federation as one of the pretexts for the takeover of Crimea.<sup>62</sup>

While the possibility of such a threat remains far lower than the straightforward daily incidents that Jewish communities have to deal with, it is important to keep the possibility of the “firefighter arson” or “false-flag” scenario in mind. Special caution is then advised when commenting on any incidents for the media. Jewish communities are strongly advised to use their right to decline any comments until a proper investigation is concluded so that they do not become unsuspecting tools of somebody else’s propaganda warfare. For the success of a false-flag terrorist scenario, cooperation of the victim is essential. Refusal to cooperate and the threat of quick exposure may be an effective deterrent in such a scenario, along with the standard security procedures that are already in place.

## Conclusions

Some of the far-right “friends of Israel” should come with a health warning: “May contain traces of antisemitism and conspiracy theories”. Long gone are the times in which the Jews had to be careful only of their enemies. Now they have to worry about those who claim to be their friends. In Czechia, a new atmosphere of trust was slowly and carefully built between the State and the Jewish communities after 1989, following the Nazi Holocaust and forty years of Communist oppression. The current development, such as the presence of functionaries with conspiracist backgrounds in key positions in

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61 Vor Wahlen: Haben deutsche Rechtsextremisten Kontakte nach Russland?, Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung, February 14, 2019, available at: <https://www.maz-online.de/Nachrichten/Politik/Vor-Europawahlen-Haben-deutsche-Rechtsextremisten-Kontakte-nach-Russland> [cit. 27-1-2018].

62 Masha Kondrachuk – Stephen Ennis. Jews reject Russia claims of Ukraine anti-Semitism. *BBC*. 12 November 2014.

state media or security agencies may lead to a weakening of that carefully established and intimate trust. Very rarely had the Jewish community been forced to interfere into daily politics, yet paradoxically it is the alleged right-wing populist “friends of Israel” who force it to do so more frequently than they would desire.

An intersection of multiple factors was identified as the source of the ambivalent policies of the right-wing populists vis-à-vis the Jews – ethnopluralism, radical atheism, as well as simple political pragmatism; however, one should be careful not to reduce everything into theoretical and ideological concepts. In fact, intersection of said ideologies with the personal quirks and eccentricism of the individual politicians may well be at play. One may and should ask, however, why is such eccentricity and inconsistency possible within a party with such an authoritarian style of internal politics? What does it say about the leadership’s priorities on certain topics?

The other question is whether Israel truly deserves such friends. Should it not deserve better? The right-wing populists see the alliance with the Jews as an opportunist *quid pro quo* experiment. Jews and the State of Israel are supposed to play their roles of “court-Jews” and anti-Muslim allies. Should they refuse to play along, however, the right-wing populist parties might reverse back to their anti-Jewish positions, using that Jewish refusal as a “proof of disloyalty”. As the parties consider themselves nationalist (and anti-antisemitic), they see and present any opposition to their beliefs as an attack on the nation itself. Even if the movements today express pro-Israel and philosemitic sympathies, they still think in conspiracist frameworks. The Czech Republic has seen cases in which neoconservative philosemites and pro-Israel activists have turned into rabid anti-Semites.<sup>63</sup> And, if the Jewish organizations play along, they risk giving ammunition to conspiracy theories about the alleged “Zionist backing” of right-wing populism coming from the more traditional corners of the far-right as was documented above. There seems to be no way out of this trap other than avoiding certain political corners completely.

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63 Tarant, Zbyněk. “From Philosemitism to Antisemitism – A Case Study of the ‘Mladá Právce’ Movement in the Czech Republic”. In: Tarant, Zbyněk – Tydlitátová, Věra: Faces of Hatred. Nakladatelství ZČU v Plzni: Pilsen 2013