

WORLD NEWS

French Court Says Vandals Driven by Anti-Semitism

By INTI LANDAURO

PARIS—A French prosecutor requested opening a formal judicial probe into five teenage boys suspected of desecrating a Jewish graveyard in eastern France over the weekend, an incident that has fueled anxiety within France's Jewish community a month after deadly terror attacks in Paris.

Philippe Vannier, a state prosecutor in Saverne in the Alsace region, said Wednesday that the five teenagers, who range from 15 to 17 years old, acknowledged participating in the knocking over and vandalizing of about 250 out of the 400 tombstones at the cemetery while yelling anti-Semitic slogans and spitting on Jewish symbols such as the Star of David.

"The anti-Semitic connotation and motive are now very clear," Mr. Vannier said.

He recommended the boys be placed under judiciary control, which would include prohibiting them from meeting each other. He requested that two of them be locked in a juvenile detention center. The boys haven't been identified, and prosecutor's office decline to comment on whether the teenagers had lawyers representing them.

If charged and convicted of damaging public property and vandalizing a burial site because it was Jewish, the suspects could face a maximum of seven years in prison, though any sentence could be halved because of their age, according to the prosecutor's office.

The graveyard vandalism in Sarre-Union, a town in a rural area near the border with Germany, sparked outrage in France, where Jews have been the target of a series of attacks, including the killing of four people in a kosher supermarket in Paris on Jan. 9.

French President François Hollande visited the graveyard Tuesday and urged the French judiciary to severely punish the perpetrators of the desecration. He recommended the teenagers work in restoring the graveyard.

European Jews Rebuff Exodus Call

By NAFTALI BENDAVID

BRUSSELS—Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's calls for European Jews to move to Israel after recent terrorist killings are prompting a backlash from Jews themselves, reopening a long-standing debate about the role of Israel in the Jewish world.

Following attacks in Paris and Copenhagen, Mr. Netanyahu has declared Israel "the home of every Jew." But for many Jews, such remarks ignore, and even insult, the acceptance they feel in the countries where they and their families have often lived for generations.

"We are a little confused by this call, which is basically like a call to surrender to terror," said Arie Zuckerman, senior executive at the European Jewish Congress. Menachem Margolin, general director of the European Jewish Association, said Mr. Netanyahu is wrong in suggesting that Jews can't live safely in Europe. "To come out with this kind of statement after each attack is unacceptable," Rabbi Margolin said.

Other Jews in Europe are reacting the same way. Sydney Schreiber, a Canadian attorney who moved to Brussels in 1992, called Mr. Netanyahu's remarks appalling, complaining of "a statement that can be interpreted as meaning that Jews don't belong in Europe."

The widespread rejection of Mr. Netanyahu's remarks is unusual, given Jewish activists' frequent efforts to unite behind Israel's leaders. It comes on the heels of the furor caused by Mr. Netanyahu's planned speech to Congress, which concerns U.S. Jewish leaders because it is seen as a snub of the White House.

Mr. Netanyahu's appeals have also revived sensitivities that date to the beginning of the Zionist movement. From the outset, some Zionists envisioned all Jews moving to the Jewish state, while others pictured it as one of many vibrant Jewish communities world-wide.

"In a way, Netanyahu is doing nothing other than repeating a classic mantra," said Daniel Levy, who heads the Middle East program at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

Few Israelis expect a mass immigration to Israel. But an under-



A rabbi stands Tuesday amid the damage at a Jewish cemetery in eastern France, where about 250 graves were desecrated over the weekend.

current of tension has persisted between Israeli leaders, who urge Jewish immigration, and Jewish leaders in the U.S. and in Europe, who work to foster Jews' acceptance in their home countries. Mr. Netanyahu's appeals have broken that tension into the open.

His words are proving more popular in Israel, where the perception of growing European anti-Semitism has featured in the

election campaign. Leaders from across the political spectrum have supported the prime minister's outreach to Jewish Europeans.

The Israeli government has set aside about \$40 million in additional money to assist Jews who want to come this year, according to Mr. Netanyahu's office. "It is probably a historical moment in which many Jews in Europe, perhaps tens of thousands, are con-

sidering immigration," said Yigal Palmour, spokesman for the Jewish Agency for Israel, a nongovernmental agency that helps Jews wanting to immigrate.

But Mr. Palmour said it is too early to tell whether the terrorist attacks have affected immigration. Denmark's Jewish community numbers about 7,000, of which 12 moved to Israel last year, he said. In France, some

6,900 Jews out of a population of a half million came to Israel in 2014, up from 3,300 in 2013.

Daniel Schwammenthal, director of the Brussels-based AJC Transatlantic Institute, which fights anti-Semitism in Europe, said many Jews now feel unsafe on the Continent. "European governments have failed their Jewish citizens," he said. Whether they leave, he added, won't be determined by Mr. Netanyahu, but by whether things improve: "They just feel insecure and in some cases they have lost trust in Europe, and this should change."

Alberto Saravelle, 58, a lawyer in Milan, said today's Europe isn't like that of the 1930s, during the rise of Nazism. "This is my home," Mr. Saravelle said. "I think it's important for us to stay in our countries and make a stand here against all forms of anti-Semitism, discrimination and racial hatred. My father and uncle were forced to leave this country in 1939, and I don't want to do that."

—Nicholas Casey contributed to this article.

Israel's Leader Faces Criticism Over Spending Audit

TEL AVIV—Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded to critics on Wednesday after a state auditor's report accused him and his wife of excessive spending on food and cleaning services at their official and private residences.

A new poll conducted for Israel's Army Radio indicated some erosion in support for the prime minister a month before national elections. However analysts cautioned that the scandal isn't likely to spur a major realignment

in the balance of power and could very well have a negligible impact when Israelis eventually go to the polls. The impact is likely to fade with the campaign focus expected to turn to national security in the weeks ahead. Mr. Netanyahu is to deliver an address on Iran to Congress on March 3.

The prime minister accused his critics of trying to create a "smokescreen" over the auditor's report to boost the election prospects of opposition leader Yit-

zhak Herzog of the Labor Party and his deputy, Tzipi Livni, while obscuring the debate on who is better suited to handle national security.

State Comptroller Yosef Shapira's report found the premier's food and entertainment expenses exceeded \$120,000 in 2011—more than double what was spent two years earlier. The comptroller's office didn't find suspicion of criminal conduct by the prime minister or his aides.

—Joshua Mitnick



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