The Norwegian Elections, Israel, and the Jews

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Developments in Norway are rarely analyzed abroad – not even in Israel, despite the fact that Norway was the most problematic country in Europe for Israel from 2005-13. Under governments led by Labor Party leader Jens Stoltenberg, anti-Israel attitudes flourished. There were also extreme expressions of anti-Semitism, including shots fired by a Muslim at Oslo’s only synagogue. In 2012, the well-known Norwegian author Hanne Nabintu Herland called Norway the “most anti-Semitic country.” The recent surprise victory of Prime Minister Erna Solberg, the Conservative leader, could alter this dynamic for the better.

The current prime minister of Norway, Erna Solberg, leader of the Conservative Party (Hoyre), and three potential coalition parties unexpectedly won Norway’s September 11 elections, receiving 89 out of 170 seats. Creating a government will not be easy, however. The Christian Democrat Party, a Solberg ally that barely passed the entrance threshold of 4%, is opposed to the anti-Islam Progress Party’s continuing in government.

A few months ago, polls indicated that Labor and its allies would return to power. Had that in fact occurred, Labor leader Jonas Gahr Stoere would have become prime minister. In that event, Norway would likely have joined Sweden sooner or later in recognizing a Palestinian Authority government that controls part of the Palestinian territories.

In 2011, Anders Breivik murdered 77 people, mainly Labor Party youngsters. Then-prime minister Jens Stoltenberg thereafter publicly proclaimed that Norway, despite this tragic event, would become an even more open democracy. In reality, dissenters who strongly opposed social-democratic rule were even
more ostracized than before. (After his 2013 defeat, Stoltenberg became secretary general of NATO.)

As prime minister, Stoltenberg was not so much an anti-Israeli inciter himself as he was tolerant of such incitement by his party and allies. At several venues where he spoke, there were brutal verbal attacks on Israel, but he remained silent. By not confronting these attacks he condoned them.

Moreover, the Stoltenberg governments were the only European ones to include the extreme left. Several ministers came from the SV party, some of the founders of which were Norwegian communists. These governments frequently applied double standards against Israel, a behavior that fits the European definition of anti-Semitic acts.

The Stoltenberg government proffered *de facto* legitimization on the Islamist Palestinian terror group Hamas on several occasions. It also called on Israel to take down the security barrier, which would, had Israel complied, have facilitated Palestinian terror attacks. In yet another example of the poor judgment of a democratic prime minister, the Stoltenberg government also organized major festivities on the occasion of the 150th birthday of the late writer Knut Hamsun, a fanatical admirer of Hitler.

As for Labor leader Stoere, his anti-Israelism reached an extreme point when he wrote a back-cover blurb legitimizing a book by two Norwegian Hamas supporters, Mads Gilbert and Erik Fosse. Writing on the 2009 Cast Lead campaign in Øyne i Gaza (“*Eyes in Gaza*”), they claimed that Israel had entered the Gaza Strip in 2009 to kill women and children.

Stoere has always played both sides, however. In January 2009, the most anti-Semitic riots ever to have taken place in Norway occurred in Oslo. Muslims attacked pro-Israel demonstrators with potentially lethal projectiles. Stoere visited the Oslo synagogue afterward to express his solidarity with the Jewish community.

A study, paid for by the government, was published in 2012 by the Norwegian Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities. The study found that 38% percent of Norwegians believe Israel acts towards the Palestinians the way the Nazis behaved towards the Jews.

During Erna Solberg’s tenure as prime minister, which began in 2013, extreme anti-Israelism among organizations mainly on the Norwegian left continued apace. The large trade union LO, which is a major force behind the Labor Party, came out in favor of totally boycotting Israel. In 2014, the Christian youth organization YMCA-YWCA voted in favor of a boycott on goods and services from the territories. (The Oslo chapter rejected the boycott.)
It is easy to underestimate the importance of Norway because it is not a member of the EU and has only about 5 million inhabitants. Yet its huge gas and oil income has enabled it to make major donations abroad, including to Palestinian causes. Labor governments did so extensively, and the Solberg government has continued the practice.

In May of this year, however, Norway asked for funds it had donated to a center for women in the West Bank village of Barak to be returned. It had become known that the center was named for Dalal Mughrabi, who led the 1978 massacre on a highway near Tel Aviv that killed 37 Israeli civilians, many of them children, and wounded dozens.

A recent study by Jonas Duc Enstad of Oslo University’s Center for the Study of Extremism stated that it seems that “most anti-Semitic incidents in Norway are caused by Arabs and left-wing radicals.”

As Sweden’s government is currently the main anti-Israel inciter in Europe, it is interesting to note that before the elections, Norwegian Immigration Minister Sylvi Listhaug, of the Progress Party, kept warning that Norway should not allow “Swedish conditions” to develop.

The Financial Times wrote: “That is code for the gang warfare, shootings, car burnings and other integration problems that Sweden has endured recently in the suburbs of its three largest cities, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.” One might also recall that Malmö is considered by many experts the anti-Semitism capital of Europe.

Listhaug traveled to Stockholm shortly before the elections and visited the extremely violent Rinkeby suburb. She made a point of noting that there are more than 60 no-go zones in Sweden. Sweden, with its 10 million citizens, is the dominant Scandinavian country, and many Swedes look down on Norway. This unusual Norwegian criticism hit Sweden below the belt, all the more so as it is largely true.

If Solberg manages to govern for four years, this may enable Israel to further improve relations with Norway and better counteract its leftwing enemies there.

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