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The Circumcision Debate in Germany in 2012 and its Impacts on Europe

On May 7, 2012, German society held its breath. The Regional Court of the west German city of Cologne passed a ruling that criminalized the circumcision of boys for religious reasons. Many German Jews could not believe their ears and eyes: A few judges from a German regional court were due to ban a religious requirement that Jews had observed for thousands of years and one that many Muslims in Germany also observe. It was a mandate that nobody really expected. Until then, Sweden had been the only country with legislation setting out pre-conditions for the procedure. In other countries, for example the United States of America, circumcision is even a part of basic health care, about 70 percent of male residents are circumcised.¹

So what, in fact, happened? The “Cologne case”² of May 2012 centered on a four-year-old boy whose Muslim parents allowed him to be circumcised by a local doctor, which led to medical complications in the aftermath. When the child returned to the hospital two days after the circumcision with post-operative bleeding, another doctor phoned the police. The circumcising doctor was acquitted by the court as there was no existing law prohibiting religious circumcision. Though, afterward the Cologne court reached a decision to criminalize religious circumcision in general. According to the judges, the constitutional freedom of religion could not justify physical interventions such as circumcision.

The ruling of the Regional Court of Cologne was not valid at all for any other German city or area, or even for the federal republic. However, this issue was on the table now, and it took nearly a half year before the raised juridical conflict could be resolved. Yet in summer 2012, amid a heated public debate about the legality of ritual circumcisions, criminal charges were filed against at least two rabbis who had pledged to continue performing circumcisions. For example,

1 Cf. M. Gehlen and L. Halter, “In den USA ist es Routine,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, June 28, 2012, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/beschneidung-in-den-usa-ist-es-routine/6806704.html>. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from German are made by the author of this article.

2 Jews in Germany have adhered to the commandment of circumcision (*brit mila*), which is performed on the eighth day after birth, for some 1,700 years. Cologne itself had a synagogue at least as early as 321 C.E. when Constantine the Great ruled the city as part of the Roman Empire, well before the ancestors of most of the city’s current inhabitants had settled on German soil. See S. Kaplan, “Will Europe ban Circumcision?” *Mosaic Magazine*, August 29, 2018, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/observation/2018/08/will-europe-ban-circumcision/>.

four German citizens filed criminal complaints against Rabbi David Goldberg, an Israeli, who served the Jewish Community in the city of Hof (Bavaria) at that time and also worked as a *mohel*.³

Although the Cologne decision came in the context of a case involving a Muslim boy, both—Muslim and Jewish communities in Germany—felt the same shock. Expectedly, the Cologne case became quickly part of public discussion, and especially Jewish leaders quickly raised their voice.

One of the most disputed statements of the early days in the debate came from former President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Charlotte Knobloch, a Holocaust survivor herself. Knobloch went straight to the public, notably in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, speaking *tacheles*:

For six decades I have had to justify myself because I stayed in Germany, as a remnant of a destroyed world, as a sheep among wolves ... I always readily carried this burden because I was firmly convinced that this country and these people deserved it. Now, for the first time my basic convictions are starting to shake. For the first time I feel resignation. I seriously ask if the country still wants us.⁴

Indeed, the new situation appeared as extremely problematic—for Jewish and Muslim leaders, for rabbis and imams, for parents affected, and for medical doctors and *mohalim* as well. Some of the German rabbis immediately started to make it very clear: Should the Cologne ruling be adopted by the Federal State of Germany, a Jewish exodus would be the inevitable result. But it was not only the imminent legal restriction poisoning the situation. Everybody realized that it would take time to clarify the juridical situation. Though, at the same time, public discourse was lighted by mainstream media, the new social media, and some surveys and barometers of public opinion. The tenor of the discussions prompted the impression that many German non-Jews would be ignorant to essentials of Jewish belief or would even use the opportunity to show their dislike of Jewish tradition.

“This discussion has shown that we are foreigners in our own country, doing something that Germans are not supposed to do,” said Stephan J. Kramer, then secretary general of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. “We are accused of torturing our own children.”⁵ Meanwhile, the first Jewish families openly started

³ *Mohel* is the Hebrew word for “circumciser,” a trained Jewish person, practicing the *brit mila*.

⁴ J. Dempsey, “Germany’s Jews and the Controversy over Circumcision,” *Carnegie Europe*, September 10, 2012, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/49323>.

⁵ J. Ewing, “Some Religious Leaders See a Threat as Europe Grows More,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/20/world/europe/circumcision-debate-in-europe-reflects-deeper-tensions.html>.

to think about consequences, if the Cologne ruling would be adopted by the federal state. Especially young, traditional Jewish families came up with the intention of “emigration from Germany” or with organizing the *brit mila* for their newborn little sons—“illegally”—in any of the neighboring countries. The Jewish medical doctors, for their part, faced the most practical problem: Should they continue to perform circumcision, or just stop it for a while and to avoid the risk of criminal proceedings? Some had to face a frontal attack by their own co-workers: 600 German physicians and lawyers signed an open letter to Chancellor Angela Merkel in the renowned *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) on July 21, proclaiming that “religious freedom cannot be a charter for violence” and asserting that circumcision violates the “right of children to bodily integrity and sexual self-determination.” In depicting circumcision as a form of bodily harm imposed by adults on powerless children, the doctors asserted that “religious freedom cannot be a blank check for sexual violence against underage boys.”⁶

Within a few weeks, the issue turned from a medical and juridical to a moral problem. In August 2012, Germany’s national Ethics Council (“Ethik-Rat”) unanimously recommended establishing legal standards, including the observation of minimum requirements such as information, medical pain treatment, and a professional operating procedure. But at the same time, renowned Israeli public figures piped up strengthening the position of the Jewish leaders in Germany. Several senior Israeli officials—including President Shimon Peres, Interior Minister Eli Yishai, and Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger—contacted German authorities and strongly asked to care for real legal safety for Jews seeking to circumcise their newborn sons. Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger even had a performance at the Federal Press Conference in Berlin where he underlined: “Circumcision is the flag of Judaism, and this flag is more than just a symbol.”⁷

The Jews in Israel, but also diaspora communities, followed the German developments with a certain worry. Though, one of the dynamic effects of the circumcision debate in Germany—and of following debates elsewhere in Europe—was that Jewish religious congregations closed ranks, feeling that the ethic debate on circumcision has been quickly accompanied, or even dominated, by attempts to offend the Jewish religion in its fundamental parts. Even the liberal

6 B. Cohen, “Europe’s Assault on a Jewish Ritual,” *Commentary Magazine*, November 1, 2012, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/europes-assault-on-jewish-ritual/>. See also D. P. Goldman, “The Sacred Rite of Circumcision,” *Tablet Magazin*, August 9, 2012, <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/108801/sacred-rite-of-circumcision>.

7 K. Richter, “Fragen an den Oberrabbiner,” *Jüdische Allgemeine*, August 23, 2012, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/article/view/id/13816>.

World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), the largest congregational Jewish roof organization worldwide, strongly backed the demand of the Jewish organizations in Germany for continuing permission of *brit mila*, describing circumcision as an “essential part of our Covenant with the Eternal.” All orthodox Jewish organizations, anyway, required the opportunity of perpetuation of the *brit mila* in the religious communities.

Finally, the political sphere was forced to react: The German government prepared a proposed resolution legalizing ritual circumcisions in general—assuming that they are performed by a medical professional—allowing Jews and Muslims to breathe a sigh of relief. At a special hearing, the Bundestag legal committee examined the medical risks that circumcision entails. Medical doctors, legal experts, and representatives from Jewish and Muslim associations thoroughly discussed the topic with parliamentarians. As the most controversial aspect appeared the question of the age until circumcision could remain legalized. The new regulation should have allowed parents to authorize the circumcision of their son by a trained practitioner. Once the boy reaches six months of age, the procedure needs to be performed by a medical doctor. The relevant bill was then discussed in the German parliament, the Bundestag: The new law, passed by a vote of 434 to 100 on December 12, 2018, grants parents the right to authorize circumcision by a trained practitioner.

An alternative draft law, handed in by a group of opposition left-wing lawmakers, was also on the agenda. They proposed that parents should have to wait until their son is fourteen so that he can give informed consent for the procedure. This draft took into account criticism by children’s protection organizations and the Association of Pediatricians, which followed the Cologne court’s ruling. Under this proposal, circumcision on the eighth day after birth would be ruled out.

Both the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Central Council of Muslims welcomed the decision of the German parliament, a gasp of relief was to hear among both communities. It seems obvious that a clear stand by German Chancellor Angela Merkel helped a lot to induce the solution accepted by German Jews and Muslims just within a half year. Merkel had the backing of the strongest political forces at that time, but faced, anyhow, a lot of “headwind” from other parts of society, not only from the 600 medical doctors and lawyers mentioned above. We might assume that the German Chancellor knew about the almost 50 percent of German inhabitants who disagreed with her standpoint. These people shared the view of the Cologne court that neither parenthood

nor freedom of religion would legitimate circumcision. Also to their mind, circumcision would be an unlawful assault thus “worth” prosecution.⁸

German media, social networks, and TV channels had picked up the topic, and for months it remained as a hot potato. At least parts of the Jewish community and its leadership perceived the general ambience as hostile or even embittered, even when the battle was over. For example, Dieter Graumann, then head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, concluded: “Nowhere else in the entire world has this debate been held with such acrimony, frostiness and at times brutal intolerance.”⁹ What Graumann also probably had in mind were statements by self-proclaimed human rights activists, by pediatricians, journalists, and intellectuals who all agreed that the religious circumcision of boys would be a “barbaric ritual” not consistent with the modern world of the twenty-first century and harmful for the little boys. Some of the fighting protagonists also did not hesitate to compare religious circumcision of boys in Jewish and Islamic religion with forms of female genital mutilation in some regions of the African continent.

Indeed, the chorus of those who had started to campaign against circumcision in general was long and dogged—and encompassed very different groups and personalities. When not accusing Jews of depravity, circumcision opponents labeled them venal. Thus, the secular humanist foundation (“Humanistische Union”) leading the anti-circumcision campaign alleged that the ritual was a “two billion dollar business that has many profiteers.”¹⁰ At the same time, Marlene Rupprecht, a leading member of the Social Democratic Party, accused “Jewish circles” of using the “bludgeon of the Shoa” to suppress Germans from debating a topic that would only be off-limits in a “theocracy.”¹¹ Holm Putzke, a law professor at the University of Passau (Bavaria) who made a name for himself as an anti-circumcision crusader, echoed the notion of a cabal of Jewish guilt-mongers, stating that “The (Cologne, O.G.) court has, in con-

⁸ C. Bommarius, “Beschneidung und Holocaust,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, August 15, 2012, <http://www.fr.de/politik/meinung/leitartikel-beschneidung-und-holocaust-a-812351>.

⁹ “Juden und Muslime gehen gemeinsam auf die Straße,” *WELT Online*, September 9, 2012, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article109113576/Juden-und-Muslime-gehen-gemeinsam-auf-die-Strasse.html>.

¹⁰ J. Kirchick, “Germany’s Circumcision Debate: A Personal Reflection,” American Institute for Contemporary German Studies (AICGS), issued December 12, 2012, accessed February 12, 2021, <https://www.aicgs.org/2012/12/germanys-circumcision-debate-a-personal-reflection/>.

¹¹ Ibid.

trast to many politicians, not allowed itself to be scared by the fear of being criticized as anti-Semitic or opposed to religion.”¹²

Germany has—for the time being—found a solution, but the effects of the Cologne court’s ruling were quickly felt beyond the German borders: copycat bans on *brit mila* emerged in neighboring countries, including Switzerland and Austria. Swiss hospitals announced that they would abstain from performing circumcisions because they were “evaluating the legal and ethical stance in Switzerland.” The chief executive of Austria’s Vorarlberg province, Markus Wallner, even told regional hospitals to refrain from circumcision for religious reasons “until the legal situation had been clarified” following the Cologne court’s decision.¹³

One year later, the debate spilled over to the overall continental level, again with irritating undertones. In October 2013 the Council of Europe, considered the continent’s leading human rights organization, introduced a resolution called “Children’s Right to Physical Integrity.” The resolution based on a report by the former Social Democratic delegate Marlene Rupprecht of Germany, the same person mentioned above. In this resolution, which was confirmed by a majority of the Assembly of the “Council of Europe”—concern is expressed

about a category of violation of the physical integrity of children, which supporters of the procedures tend to present as beneficial to the children themselves despite clear evidence to the contrary. This includes, amongst others, female genital mutilation, the circumcision of young boys for religious reasons, early childhood medical interventions in the case of intersex children, and the submission to, or coercion of, children into piercings, tattoos or plastic surgery.¹⁴

Undoubtedly, there were a lot of progressive ideas and important demands, for example, regarding early childhood medical intervention. But the kindly seeming paragraph, full of ideals how to protect children’s life and integrity, equated female genital mutilation, which is always torture, and often murder, and piercings tattoos or plastic surgery of young children with ritual male circumcision commonly practiced among religious and non-religious Jews, Muslims, and other people around the globe. Moreover: In consequence, the Council of Europe called on its member states to care for a “public debate,” also among the reli-

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Wallner backtracked a week later, after Austria’s justice minister declared that parents could not be punished for circumcising infants. See Goldman, “The Sacred Rite of Circumcision.”

¹⁴ Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, “Report | Doc. 13297: Children’s Right to Physical Integrity,” issued October 5, 2012, accessed February 12, 2021, <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=20057&lang=en>.

gious communities. Declarations of the Council of Europe, and also of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe—not to be confused with the European Parliament—have no political or juridical consequences. Nevertheless we can assume that declarations of this body reflect general moods and attitudes in Europe. Seventy-seven delegates voted for the resolution and only nineteen against it. The fact that the then President of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, distanced himself from the declaration, appears only as a “cold comfort.”

Meanwhile it is more than obvious that attempts to ban religious circumcision rip into the heart of Jewish and Muslim religion. Circumcision of masculine infants is one of the elementary commonalities practiced across the various Jewish denominations. Even progressive Jews who embrace marriage to non-Jews, gay marriage, and female elevation to the rabbinate insist on it. But delegate Rupprecht and the other activists of the Council of Europe seemingly aimed to urge Jews and Muslims to introduce alternative rituals to express their covenant with God and their communion with their ancestors. Now, the biggest sticking point in the whole debate seems to be the question at what point the critiques become antisemitic. Or in other words: At what point do critical attacks on circumcision delegitimize the Jewish religion at its core, and the Islamic religion as well? Regarding attacks on the Jewish circumcision, Swedish psychologist Lars Dencik refers to the phenomenon of “Enlightened antisemitism” (“Aufklärungsantisemitismus”)¹⁵ especially prevalent in highly modernized, liberal states. Berlin sociologist Gökçe Yurdakul even concludes that “the language that has been used in legal decisions and in the media” during the German circumcision debate “have deeply stigmatised and criminalised Jewish and Muslim people in this context.”¹⁶

However, the driving forces behind circumcision debates might be quite varying, and so too their motives, and the impacts are different in the respective countries and societies. For the German debate, American-Jewish publicist Alan Dershowitz remarked already in 2012 in a Jewish weekly:

15 Dencik writes: “There are often (but probably not only) humanitarian concerns and liberal ideas about the individual’s right to choose for him-/herself ... involved in this critique of Jewish traditions. We use the term *Aufklärungsantisemitismus* to summarize this phenomenon.” L. Dencik and K. Marosi, “Different Antisemitisms: On Three Distinct Forms of Antisemitism in Contemporary Europe. With Special Focus on Sweden,” *Nordisk judaistik: Scandinavian Jewish Studies* 27, no. 2 (2016): 78.

16 G. Yurdakul, “Jews, Muslims and the Ritual Male Circumcision Debate: Religious Diversity and Social Inclusion in Germany,” *Social Inclusion* 4, no. 2 (2016): 84.

Nobody should praise a nation that has killed millions of Jewish babies and children but now sheds crocodile tears for ... a little boy who is circumcised in the frame of a thousand-years-old tradition, one week after his birth.

In the same comment, Dershowitz wrote:

Other countries, with a more tidy history have to take the lead in research—in real research—and in the debate on the protection of children and animals. The murderous history of Germany disqualifies this country forever as a vanguard to prohibit Jewish rituals.¹⁷

However, not only the German Jews and Alan Dershowitz but also the Israeli Chief Rabbinate and certain Israeli politicians sounded the alarm in summer and fall of 2012. And there were also non-Jewish German voices who shared the feelings of uncertainty and made attempts to solidarize with Jews and Muslims. For example, Kerstin Griesse, responsible for religious affairs in the Social Democratic Fraction of the German Bundestag, declared without ambiguity: “Some of the statements in the media, and especially on the internet do really unsettle me. They spread the antisemitic image that Jews would torture their children.” Griesse also stated: “We know that 20 percent of the population in Germany have latent antisemitic attitudes. But for some months they are no longer latent, but strongly visible in the public.”¹⁸

Interestingly, Kerstin Griesse also criticized that some of the media would magnify the topic, and in 2017 she remembered in an interview with a Jewish weekly again:

I've never experienced in my life a debate, which was so underground, so emotional and so antisemitic. This topic (i.e., circumcision, O.G.) has opened a tun: All those, who always wanted to say something against Jews and Muslims, now have expressed it openly. I was shocked at how little understanding and how little willingness to understand Jewish identity was present across the political camps.¹⁹

What impact will the “Circumcision Debate” in Germany have in the long run on the Jewish communities themselves? Swiss-Jewish Professor of Literature, Alfred Bodenheimer, wrote a book on the debate, and he concluded in an interview with the weekly *Jüdische Allgemeine* with a certain tinge of disillusionment:

17 A. Dershowitz, “Der gute alte Antisemitismus,” *Jüdische Allgemeine*, September 6, 2012, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/article/view/id/13922>.

18 K. Griesse, “Das ist richtiger Hass,” interview by A. Lutz, *Pro, Christliches Magazin*, December 11, 2012, <https://www.pro-medienmagazin.de/politik/2012/12/11/das-ist-richtiger-hass/>.

19 K. Griesse, “Solidarisch mit Israel,” interview, *Jüdische Allgemeine*, September 14, 2017, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/article/view/id/29616>.

First of all, the circumcision debate made one thing clear for the German Jews: It is the fact that they didn't arrive anywhere, as a religious group. Their religious practice can suddenly be declared barbarism—by two thirds of the population.²⁰

Bodenheimer explicitly referred to the European dimension of the problem and wrote in his book:

Thus, when there is debate on the legitimation and opportunities of Jewish life in a country, the stakes are high: the ability of a society to tolerate difference, to be aware, when the sharpness of applied law and overflowing discourses disavows well-meaning intentions. This is a script for living together in the Europe of today.²¹

Indeed, the uncertainties and disillusionments are not limited on the Jews currently living in Germany. They have spread across Europe. Similar campaigns against ritual circumcision were carried out in Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Poland, Denmark, and Iceland, progressing to Holland and France. It is without a doubt that the campaigns are accepted by considerable parts of the non-Jewish population but deeply harm and alienate the Jewish population from their neighborhoods. Huge majorities of the Jewish respondents in a 2012 survey by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) in nine EU member states explicitly classified a hypothetical ban on circumcision as a huge problem for themselves. Over three quarters of the respondents in France (88%), Belgium (87%), Italy (85%), and the United Kingdom (80%) and over two thirds in Germany (71%) and Sweden (68%) indicated that a prohibition of the *brit mila* would get them into big trouble.²² An extreme German peculiarity in the same FRA survey was the huge share of witnessed non-Jewish Germans who would suggest prohibition of the *brit mila*: Nearly 30% in Germany, while the other countries were even below 20%. This appeared as a direct result of the “circumcision debate.”

Irrespective of existing discussions on whether circumcision might be an “outdated” ritual of former ages in Jewish and other religions—the huge numbers of Jewish respondents in the FRA survey confirming *brit mila* as an essen-

²⁰ A. Bodenheimer, “Toleranz genügt nicht,” *Jüdische Allgemeine*, December 6, 2012, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/article/view/id/14670>.

²¹ A. Bodenheimer, *Haut ab! Die Juden in der Beschneidungsdebatte* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), 60.

²² Cf. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Discrimination and Hate Crime against Jews in EU Member States: Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014), http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2013-discrimination-hate-crime-against-jews-eu-member-states-0_en.pdf.

tial, indispensable part of their religious beliefs and practice should have encouraged Europe's politicians to revisit the intended politics of restriction in this sensible field. Though, obviously until today they have not.

In strong contrast to these trends, Ira Forman, the then US State Department's special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism in the Obama administration, warned the European governments already in summer 2014 that moves to ban ritual circumcision could lead to the demise of their countries' Jewish communities. In an interview with the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Forman, himself a Jew, declared: "Our priority is to make sure these communities don't go out of existence. It would be a tragedy not just for the communities. It would be a tragedy for Europe, for these cultures."²³

Meanwhile the fights concerning the "legality" of boy's circumcision continue with unabated persistence. Thus, while the Iceland parliament has discussed initiating legislation to ban circumcision,²⁴ in May 2018 a majority of the European Parliament and its President Antonio Tajani expressed support for the Jewish right to continue religious traditions and practices. At a ceremony in Brussels' Great Synagogue, Tajani said that there would be no place for banning European Jews from carrying out religious rites such as circumcision and kosher slaughter. The president declared:

Europe will not achieve integration and unity among its citizens as long as it limits or bans the religious community from fulfilling its religious commandments, such as circumcision and kosher slaughter ... Only by protecting their rights and preserving their identities, will every citizen have personal security, with the unity and equality which lead to tranquil lives. This is what Europe is based on.²⁵

²³ R. Kampeas, "U.S. Intervenes in Europe's Circumcision Wars," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (JTA), July 8, 2014, <https://www.jta.org/2014/07/08/news-opinion/world/u-s-intervenes-in-europes-circumcision-wars>.

²⁴ The suggested legislation, recently introduced in Iceland's parliament by Silja Dögg Gunnarsdóttir, a member of the center-right Progressive Party, would impose prison sentences of up to six years on anyone performing circumcision on a child that is not for medical reasons. The proposal won support from around one-third of Iceland's doctors. See C. Glick, "Anti-Semitism in Poland in Part of a Larger European Problem," Caroline Glick, issued February 20, 2018, accessed February 12, 2021, <https://carolineglick.com/anti-semitism-in-poland-in-part-of-a-larger-european-problem/>. More recently S. Smith, "Iceland's proposed ban on circumcision rattles Jews, Muslims," *NBC News*, September 21, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/iceland-s-proposed-ban-circumcision-rattles-jews-muslims-n910541>.

²⁵ H. Lev, "EU Parliament President: No Laws against Jewish Practice," *Arutz Sheva*, May 28, 2018, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/246560>.

Tajani also promised: “The European Parliament will continue to condemn and consistently and determinedly fight all forms of anti-Semitism and hatred, and will protect religious freedom.”²⁶ However, only one month later the Danish parliament also began discussing a ban on circumcision, which was extremely alarming to the Jewish community.²⁷ Danish Jews, while living in one of the most liberal countries in the world, now began to consider leaving. The real alarming point, also in Denmark, is the Jewish feeling that a considerable part of the non-Jewish population is eager to back such a law to ban circumcision of newborn boys. In the run-up to the Danish parliament’s discussion, more than 50,000 people signed a petition on the Danish parliament’s website endorsing the text, which equates nonmedical circumcision of boys with female genital mutilation (!). This could even mark a certain “breakthrough,” a new regulation says that 50,000 signatures within six months of their posting on the parliament’s website are expected to be brought to a vote as a nonbinding draft motion in parliament.²⁸ Already in a survey conducted in 2016 among 1,027 adult Danes, 87 percent of respondents said they support a ban on nonmedical circumcision of boys.²⁹

Since the protagonists of campaigns against religious circumcision come from quite different professions, milieus, and political camps—just as in the 2012 “Circumcision Debate” in Germany not a few medical doctors, lawyers, self-proclaimed human rights activists, public figures, and politicians from right to left—it remains, again, quite difficult to clear the “twilight zone” between pure political and/or anti-religious activism and distinct antisemitism. In fact, Jews and Muslims are in the same boat here, and sometimes they pick themselves up for cooperative action, as for example joint demonstrations in Berlin in fall 2012 have shown.

For now, it is difficult to assess whether infamous antisemitic stereotypes and clichés from the past will celebrate their comeback among far-right and right-wing populist, maybe even among left-wing populist forces, when the discussion on the *brit mila* will be “reignited” again. But if Jewish religion would become problematized again in its essentials, as “something other” and “alien,” that would be high time for Europe to reconsider its own self-concept.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ C. Liphshiz, “As Denmark Considers a Ban on Circumcision, some Jews Consider Leaving,” *The Times of Israel*, June 16, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/as-denmark-considers-a-ban-on-circumcision-some-jews-consider-leaving/>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

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