

**Manfred Gerstenfeld: DECADES OF EUROPEAN MEDIA BIAS  
AGAINST ISRAEL**

**isranet-publications  
Blog, August 3, 2015**

**<https://www.isranet.org/blog/manfred-gerstenfeld-decades-european-media-bias-against-israel/>**

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**The strong bias that many European media hold against Israel has been documented for decades by a great variety of analysts. One of the first to do so was *The Jerusalem Post* editor David Bar-Illan. He gave many examples of media prejudice in his book, *Eye on the Media*,<sup>[1]</sup> published in 1983 and based on his columns in the daily.**

**In a 1985 book, Israeli diplomat Sergio Minerbi analyzed six documentaries of the French-language Belgian TV station RTBF. These focused on the Middle East and were heavily biased against Israel.<sup>[2]</sup> Henry Weinberg devoted an entire chapter of his 1987 book, *The Myth of the Jew in France*, to the widespread prejudice of the French left-wing “quality” daily, *Le Monde*.<sup>[3]</sup>**

**During an interview some ten years after the publication of his book, Bar-Illan told me that the BBC was “by far the worst offender when it comes to Israel.” He said that there were hundreds of examples of BBC malevolence within the political sphere. Bar-Illan took the example of an incident in which a coffeehouse in Arab East Jerusalem collapsed due to structural problems. Jews and Arabs worked together to save lives. The BBC did not say a word about this collaboration; all they reported was that Arabs had suffered while repeating the libel that a bomb had been placed in the coffeehouse.<sup>[4]</sup>**

**The huge outburst of European anti-Semitism that has emerged over the past fifteen years has been most violent in France. The French media prejudice against Israel was covered in 2002 in a collection of ten essays by the anti-Semitism watchdog organization, Observatoire du Monde Juif, headed by Shmuel Trigano.<sup>[5]</sup> Two essays were devoted to the bias of *Le Monde*, and an essay by**

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**Clément Weill Raynal analyzed the anti-Israel bias of the French press agency, Agence France Presse.[\[6\]](#)**

**In an interview in 2004 Trigano told me that the extreme power of the media represents a major danger to Western democracy. “Their attitude toward Israel and the Jews over the last few years has shown that they can pervert analysis, debate and criticism. We are dependent on a class of journalists with consensus political views. They read and co-opt each other’s opinions, without accountability to anyone. Freedom and democracy however, cannot coexist if truth and facts are obscured.”[\[7\]](#)**

**In 2005 I published a collection of interviews on European-Israeli relations in a book titled *Europe and Israel an Expanding Abyss*. One of the interviewees, German Christian-Democrat parliamentarian Hildegard Müller, affirmed that the media is partly responsible for Israel’s problematic image. She mentioned that they often relay news items without confirming their veracity. Müller drew attention to the repeated use of particular images which she called “news preserves.” She also remarked that many newspapers obtain their news items from press agencies, such as Agence France Press, which then leads to similar reporting in many media.[\[8\]](#)**

**Another interviewee, Robert Wistrich, the leading academic scholar on anti-Semitism, stated that the media, together with politicians and society in general, “castigate, reproach, heavily criticize, and even demonize Israel. They paint a negative and stereotypical picture of the Jewish state, especially on television and in the press.”[\[9\]](#)**

**Former Israeli ambassador to the UK, Tzvi Shtauber, recounted during his interview that he was once visited by five members of a board of a British association of journalists. A prominent journalist made a demand of Shtauber which reflected how much Israel had been demonized: “We want your assurance,**

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**Mr. Ambassador, that it is not the official policy of the State of Israel to shoot journalists.”**

**Shtauber called the BBC a problem in itself: “Over the years I had endless conversations with them. Any viewer who for a consistent period looks at the BBC’s information gets a distorted picture...it derives from the BBC’s method of Broadcasting.”[\[10\]](#)**

**A quantitative analysis of the BBC’s prejudice against Israel was undertaken by Trevor Asserson, a British litigation lawyer who has since immigrated to Israel. Between 2001 and 2004, he conducted four well-documented studies detailing the BBC’s systematic bias against Israel. Asserson mentioned that the BBC enjoys a monopoly derived from a legally binding contract with the British government.**

**Asserson analyzed the BBC’s legal obligations as delineated in its charter, and identified fifteen guidelines. These included the obligation of the BBC to ensure that opposing views are well represented and the obligation of not allowing the audience to gauge reporters’ personal views. Asserson identified many cases in which the BBC breached several of these guidelines, and added that on some occasions, it broke most of them.**

**In order to determine the extent of its bias, Asserson conducted a forensic analysis of the BBC. He concluded that the “BBC’s news reports concerning Israel are distorted by omission, by inclusion, by only giving partial facts, by who is interviewed, and by the background information provided or lack of it.”**

**Since then, a variety of European media have been analyzed for bias against Israel. A recent study by Joël Kotek, for instance, shows how Israel was portrayed in a severely distorted manner in the French-speaking Belgian media during the 2014 Protective Edge campaign against Hamas.[\[11\]](#)**

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**I also interviewed Johannes Gerster for my 2005 book. This former German parliamentarian was the head of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Israel. Gerster mentioned that he had tried in vain to convince top Israeli officials that propaganda was an essential element of war. He noted that they did not want to listen.<sup>[12]</sup>**

**We are now ten years down the road, but the situation has not changed. The problem of media bias against Israel has been documented repeatedly over the past decades, and the analytical methodology needed to assess this prejudice has been in place for years. This raises a fundamental question about Israeli policy: what has the Israeli government done to stem the tide of incitement against Israel resulting from such prejudiced reporting?**

**Why would the Israel government not follow and analyze - if necessary, by an outside contractor – the bias against Israel of a number of media over the years? Would it have been difficult to design a mode of action against those media who are, to a large extent, direct or indirect propagandists for Israel's enemies?**

**The answer can only be that the Israeli government has done next to nothing regarding the matter. One can only wonder why there are no politicians or political parties which feel it is worthwhile to raise the issue and keep it in the public eye.**

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**[1] David Bar-Illan, *Eye on the Media* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 1993).**

**[2] Sergio I. Minerbi, *Mentir Avec Les Images* (Brussels: Louis Musin, 1985).**

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(French)

**[3]** Henry H. Weinberg, *The Myth of the Jew in France 1967-1982* (Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 1987).

**[4]** Manfred Gerstenfeld, interview with David Bar-Illan, "The Loaded Dice of the Foreign Media Are There to Stay," in *Israel's New Future: Interviews* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Rubin Mass, 1994), 109-119.

**[5]** "Le conflit israélo-palestinien: Les médias français sont-ils objectifs?," *Observatoire du monde juif*, June 2002.

**[6]** Clément Weill Raynal, "L'Agence France Presse: le récit contre les faits," in "Le conflit israélo-palestinien: Les médias français sont-ils objectifs?," *Observatoire du monde juif*, June 2002, pp. 51-68.

**[7]** Manfred Gerstenfeld, interview with Shmuel Trigano, "French Anti-Semitism: A Barometer for Gauging Society's Perverseness," *Post-Holocaust and Anti-Semitism*, 26, 1 November 2004.

**[8]** Manfred Gerstenfeld, interview with Hildegard Müller, "Israel and Europe: The Positive and the Negative," in *Israel and Europe: An Expanding Abyss?* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Adenauer Foundation, 2005), pp. 40-48.

**[9]** Manfred Gerstenfeld, interview with Robert Wistrich, "Something is Rotten in the State of Europe: Anti-Semitism as a Civilizational Pathology," in *Israel and Europe: An Expanding Abyss?*, pp. 95-109.

**[10]** Manfred Gerstenfeld, interview with Zvi Shtauber, "British Attitudes toward Israel and the Jews," in *Israel and Europe: An Expanding Abyss?*, pp. 183-192

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**[11] Joël Kotek, “Israël et les médias belges francophones,” Comité de Coordination des Organisations Juives de Belgique (CCOJB,) Brussels, March 2015.**

**[12] Manfred Gerstenfeld, interview with Johannes Gerster, “Confronting European-Israeli Misunderstandings,” in *Israel and Europe: An Expanding Abyss?*, pp. 67-79.**