

THE SPECTRE OF RACISM IS HAUNTING EUROPE

by Claude Moniquet, chairman of ESISC

Racism these days is a deadly matter. **Our politicians, faced with hatred that dares to speak its name openly, have a heavy responsibility – they're responsible for their inability to apply the law, and to solve those problems that lead to rancour and animosity. They're responsible for the abysmal lack of education in the population that allows these low feelings to flourish and contaminate our youth. They're responsible for the weakness of so-called law enforcement, which allows these racist ideas to mutate into weapons of death. They're responsible for the laxity of the response to crime, which gives murderers the courage to carry their urges forward into deeds.**

Yesterday 11 May in Antwerp, city of culture and creativity, **Hans Van Temsche**, a young skinhead of 18 who **happens to be the nephew of Frieda Van Temsche, an extreme-right member of parliament representing the Vlaams Belang** (formerly Vlaams Blok) and the son of an activist in the same movement, opened fire on a young Malinese au pair girl, Mata n'Doyie, and on Luna, the two-year-old child she was looking after. Both victims died at the scene. Just prior to that double homicide, Van Temsche had turned his weapon on a Turkish woman quietly reading a book on a bench, seriously injuring her in the abdomen (she is no longer in a life-threatening condition). The young man was wounded by police and arrested.

The evening before this dreadful act, the body of a young Moroccan missing since an apparently-racist dispute was found in the Schelde river. Five days ago in Bruges, five skinheads severely beat up a French man of African origin, who remains in a coma in intensive care. On 4 March in Lyon, an Algerian father was gunned down going into a café. In February, the Halimi affair horrified all of France.

Let this terrible litany stop here. Whether the victims are Arabs, Africans or Jews, these crimes have one thing in common: they belong to the category known in the United States as "hate crimes". After the death of Ilan Halimi we wrote in a briefing note on hyper-violence, *"What the Americans call hate crimes – crimes motivated by hatred for an ethnic or religious minority, a nationality or a "type" – women, gays etc – is an unfortunate aspect of the negative evolution of our society, which is losing its structure and which is seen by some as the road to advanced decadence. The extremist or violent affirmation of one's identity and the negation of that of "the other" are the only features to guide some people, and make up for the lack of any collective identity, for the loss of standards and for the real or perceived inadequacies of the state or society. In that context, and against a background of rising extremism, anti-Semitism,*

racial hatred, homophobia and violence towards women show no signs of fading away." The news has, unfortunately, shown that to be accurate.

There is nothing inevitable about this; it is, on the contrary, a consequence of the abdication of responsibility by our governments. If racism is able to establish itself in our society, it does so because **the laws which forbid it are applied laxly or indeed not at all**. If weaker minds can be persuaded of the rightness of these sickening philosophies, that is because **the State's response to certain real problems** (immigration or the rise of Islamism, for example) lacks any force to say the least, and allows all sorts of propaganda. And we will mention in passing the **lack of any form of civic education courses**. If the most extreme of the extremists are allowed to gather and practice their perverse imitations, it's because **their organisations are insufficiently monitored**. **And if their violent ideas turn to violent acts, it's too often because they know they are taking little or no risk**. Take this young Van Temsche, who has just killed a child and a woman, and injured another woman. If he is found guilty and sentenced, it will probably be to life imprisonment – or one would hope so at least. But how long will this "life" sentence be in reality – eight years? Twelve? Certainly less than 15 years, to judge by the way sentences are applied in general.

Today, Belgian politicians are beating their breasts just as French politicians did in the wake of the Halimi affair. Their reaction is a little inadequate. They seem only now to be discovering the extent of the problem. **A democratic society does not expect from its freely elected representatives either crocodile tears or genuine regrets and sympathy. It expects action, and solutions.**