

# **An open letter to Roger Cukierman: Palestine solidarity, antisemitism and the French pro-Israel camp**

Sunday 3 August 2014, by [SALINGUE Julien](#) (Date first published: 22 July 2014).

**The below - an open letter from Palestine scholar Julien Salingue to Roger Cukierman of the French Jewish body CRIF - is translated from the original French. It helps place a lot of the lurid anglophone reporting in context.**

Since the beginning of the Israeli offensive against Gaza, the pro-Israel camp in France has continuously attacked the Palestine solidarity movement, accusing it, more or less directly, of antisemitism. It is often however those very people who denounce the conflation between, on the one hand, Israel, and on the other, Jews in general, who are actually the worst offenders in such very conflation, thereby fuelling antisemitic reactions. Roger Cukierman, President of the Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France (CRIF) (which claims to speak for all French Jews) and Vice President of the World Jewish Congress, is a prime example. Julien Salingue, a political science scholar and specialist of the Palestinian question, here addresses an open letter to him.

## **Roger Cukierman's dangerous conflation (an open letter)**

Monsieur Cukierman, I have been paying close attention to your statements for a number of days, both with regard to your open support of the current Israeli offensive (over 600 dead in Gaza in two weeks; a child killed every hour, on average, on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> July), and to your well-informed comments on the incidents and acts of violence which have taken place on the fringes of certain demonstrations held in solidarity with the Palestinians.

The aim of this text is not to respond to the questions of form and content raised by your declarations in their entirety, but simply to make you aware that you sometimes speak thoughtlessly, and that it would be wise for you to come to your senses. As to whether this is possible,

I doubt it.

### **The conflation of Jew with Israeli**

You wish to defend Israel, its politics and its military offensives? You have every right to do so. In that case, however, stop claiming to speak in the name of the Jews of France and stop upholding a dangerous conflation of Jewish people, on the one hand, with Israel on the other. Let us recall, therefore, as an example, your words on Radio France Internationale (RFI) on the 21<sup>st</sup> July:

"We claim to represent the Jews of France and we feel an affection towards the State of Israel. In the same way, French citizens of Italian origin feel a sympathy towards Italy, and it's the same for the Spanish, or for those of any other nationality or dual nationality who might live in France."

Of which “nationality” or “dual nationality” are you speaking? Does a Jewish nationality exist in the same way as an Italian or a Spanish nationality does? This is actually the case in Israel, but not in France. So to what “nationality” are you referring? It must, logically, be either to an Israeli “nationality” or to a Franco-Israeli “dual nationality”. In all logic, this “we”(who feel “affection” towards the State of Israel) is therefore a we which encompasses the Israelis of France and the Franco-Israelis. But if so, why are you speaking in this way while putting yourself forward as a “representative of the Jews of France” and not as “representative of the Israelis of France”? Do you think that being Jewish and being Israeli is the same thing?

In introducing this confusion, you are upholding a dangerous conflation which you, however, have not ceased to condemn over the last few days. Need I remind you of your words from June 2010, on the precise subject of this conflation? I believe that I do, since you seem to have a short memory: “The conflation of Jew with Israeli is a seductive one, and encourages people to smack Jews around”. You would be well advised to take this remark into account...

### **“It was a bit like Kristallnacht”**

You have moreover seen fit, in commenting on incidents and acts of violence which have taken place at the fringes of some demonstrations, to raise parallels which, although they are probably supposed to be striking, are no less dubious, scandalous even. You have stated accordingly, with reference to the confrontations which took place on July 13<sup>th</sup>, on the Rue de la Roquette in Paris: “It was a bit like Kristallnacht [the Night of Broken Glass] and we barely avoided a veritable pogrom.”

“The Night of Broken Glass”. A “pogrom”. Nothing less. Let us call to mind, for the sake of memory, what the Night of Broken Glass was, by referring to the Encyclopaedia Universalis:

On November 9<sup>th</sup> [1938], just before midnight, the Gestapo commander Heinrich Mueller, sent a telegram to every police unit informing them that “in a very short time, actions against the Jews, and in particular against synagogues, are to take place all over Germany. Nothing must hinder these operations.” On the contrary, the police were to arrest victims. Fire brigades set themselves up beside burning synagogues, having received explicit orders to let the buildings burn. They were only to intervene if neighbouring “Aryan” properties were threatened by fire.

In the space of two days and two nights, more than 1000 synagogues were set fire to or damaged. Rioters ransacked and looted approximately 5700 Jewish businesses, murdered at least 91 Jews, and vandalised Jewish hospitals, houses, schools and cemeteries. The attackers were often neighbours of the victims. Some 30000 Jewish men between the ages of sixteen and sixty were arrested. In order to incarcerate such a large number of new arrivals, the Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen concentration camps were made bigger.

Are you really referring to this tragic historic event? Did you dare compare the incidents on the Rue de la Roquette to a gigantic, murderous unleashing of violence and hatred, organised by the State itself, and seen by many historians as a prelude to the deportation and genocide of the Jews? It would seem so.

Let us put aside the fact that the initial reports of violence on the Rue de la Roquette were refuted by...the chairman of the synagogue itself, who stated, in an interview with the news channel i>Télé, that: “We were not in physical danger at any point”.

Let’s go back to your high-flown rhetoric and what it leads to: in comparing the events of the 13<sup>th</sup> July to the Night of Broken Glass, you are relativizing, to put it mildly, the reality of the latter event. In fact, in wishing to crudely exaggerate, you lead one to understand that the Night of Broken Glass

could be seen, in the end, as a demonstration which turned nasty and degenerated into violence. Would you allow me to note that your statements could easily be described as revisionist? And the same holds for your allusion to “pogroms”, just as misplaced, if not to say outrageous, as the reference to the Night of Broken Glass.

**Let us cite the *Encyclopaedia* again:**

Pogrom: Russian Term describing an attack, with looting and murders, by one part of the population against another, which entered international use to describe a massacre of Jews in Russia. (...) They arose during a political and economic crisis and were carried out thanks to the neutrality (on occasion also due to the tacit support) of the Russian authorities and army. (...) It is not easy to establish the toll of the pogroms: some 887 major and 349 “minor” pogroms can be counted, which could have caused more than 60000 deaths. In using the term “pogrom”, you are trivialising, once more, a real historical tragedy, of massacres tolerated, indeed encouraged, by the Russian authorities and army. And you are relativizing, once more, the violence of which hundreds of thousands of Jews have been the victims, on this occasion in Russia and its neighbouring countries at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

**Fighting anti-Semitism, but not by your side**

Does anti-Semitism exist in France? Obviously, and it’s up to us all to fight it implacably, whether it is from the “classic” extreme-Right, from the duo of Soral-Dieudonné, or from other hateful people trying to use the Palestinian question to brew up a stigma-fuelling discourse against the Jews, which is sometimes unfortunately acted on.

But your statements, made again and again, do not help, to put it in euphemistic terms, those who aim to fight anti-Semitism while holding on to their support for the legitimate (and internationally recognised) rights of the Palestinians.

Because YOU continue to equate Jew and Israeli.

Because YOU trivialise some of the tragedies of which Jews have been the victims.

In doing this, you are doing a service to anti-Semitic vermin in recapitulating some of the worst of their filth on your own account, even though your purposes may differ.

You wish to defend Israel? You have the right to. I am actually a believer, unlike you who supported the banning of the demonstrations, of the freedom of expression and of opinion.

However, you obviously have nothing to teach anyone about the struggle against anti-Semitism, and the best service you could render Jewish people would be to stop claiming to speak in their names.

**Julien Salingue**

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**P.S.**

\* English version from Lenin’s Tomb. FRIDAY, JULY 25, 2014:  
<http://www.leninology.co.uk/2014/07/palestine-solidarity-antisemitism-and.html>

\* Translated by Kieran O'Meara.