
BRUSSELS' JEWISH COMMUNITY LOOKS TO ISRAEL FOR IDEAS ON SECURITY AFTER ATTACKS

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After last week's bombings in Brussels, the Belgian capital is weighing how to improve security going forward. Israeli analysts are asking whether Belgium can draw lessons from their country, as Dana Regev reports.

People's questions can be overheard near the Place de la Bourse in Brussels, a gathering point for those mourning the victims of Tuesday's attacks. An American student asks her friend how it's possible for someone simply to walk into an airport with bombs. A young child presses his father, "Can this happen again?"

They are questions occupying Belgian authorities and the public at large.

A French photographer who survived the Paris attacks tells DW, "In these cases, I think we can actually learn a lot from Israel. It may not be very popular - but it's true."

For Israelis, as well as for members of the Jewish community in Brussels, some of the security solutions now expected to be implemented are already a matter of habit.

'Constant' target

Mikha Weinblum, director of youth activities in Brussels' Secular Jewish Community Center, says his friends have only recently begun to grasp what it means to be under constant threat of a terror strike.

"It was only after the attacks on Charlie Hebdo that my non-Jewish friends came to me and said that they now understand it better," he says, making reference to strict security measures in place in the community center's buildings.

"We have had police officers securing our entry doors since the Charlie Hebdo attacks and soldiers at the doors since the Paris attacks. We have double entrance doors for security," he notes.

On alert

Originally from Tel Aviv, Michal Zilberberg has lived in Brussels for six months now. She was close to the Maelbeek metro stations when the explosion occurred - and heard of the attacks from family and friends in Israel before hearing about them in Brussels.

"I got a push notification from an Israeli news website at about 8:20 local time, and then came the family WhatsApp groups and messages from friends," she says, adding that Israelis are used to being on alert regarding such attacks.

Israeli media, critics and analysts are already asking whether Belgium can learn something from the small Middle Eastern country.

A similar debate emerged in Belgium after last August, when a 26-year-old Moroccan-born man brandished weapons on a passenger train traveling from Amsterdam to Paris through Belgium, before being overpowered by other passengers.

Embarrassed by 'gloating'

"Only if you look strictly at the professional level - as a business - then sure, Belgium can learn a lot from Israel," says Zilberberg, describing security as a long-standing and important industry in Israel, "But in pretty much every other aspect, Israel can learn a lot from the Belgians - namely about how to treat the other and how to accept foreigners."

Zilberberg also describes frustration at Israelis' reactions to the Brussels blasts on social media.

"I was very embarrassed by the gloating reactions in Israel. Instead of encouraging, helping, embracing - people said, 'Now the Belgians have learned their lesson,' or similar comments." As an Israeli Jew, she says, "There was something really not Jewish about this behavior - and the Jewish community here felt it too. It was very distasteful."

Ultimately Zilberberg argues that the problems at hand require long-term and complex solutions. "The Belgian society is highly stratified, so of course the solution can only come from integration and education. There is no other way."

Kaynak/Source: