

Volt is not a Safe Place for Jews and their Allies

Disclaimer: I'm a fervent supporter of Europe, a staunch Eurofederalist and I believe in the inevitability of a pan-european movement, in a time of war, isolation and authoritarianism. I want Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace. I am a staunch opponent of the Netanyahu government and its supporters, who I believe are corrupt and don't have the best interest for Israel and Jews anywhere at heart. I want the hostages remaining in Gaza to be returned as quickly as possible, just as I hope that the war in Gaza will end, with a viable, stable future for the Gazans, without Hamas, and a return to peace negotiations to finally move towards a viable two state solution, now. I sincerely believe that the Iranian regime must fall, along with its proxies in Yemen, Lebanon and elsewhere - for the Iranian people to choose their own destiny without a Mullah regime to dictate their will. For Woman, Life, Freedom.

For the past 5 years, Volt has been my home. I fondly remember days and nights filled with discussion and deliberation, fruitful debates ranging from a European AI initiative, to Cybersecurity, through migration, education and media literacy. I remember fighting for LGBTIAQ+ rights as the EUR Co-Lead, as well as for all marginalized communities in Volt as the Co-Lead of the Diversity Council. I remember protesting in the streets of Prague, dancing with my fellow Volters in the alleys of Lisbon, and speaking at various GAs and assemblies. I have worked as a policy shaper on the European level, Policy Co-Lead on the German level and have been a candidate for the German Bundestag in 2021, a candidate for the European Board in 2022, and became a non-executive board member of Volt Germany in 2023. I am also one of the Co-Founders of the Jewish safer space on the German and European levels. There was always a feeling of belonging even in dissent.

October 7th, 2023 changed all that. For several years we had built up a Jewish community group in the party, an antithesis to the Antisemitism work group that existed before. Our idea was to highlight how versatile and diverse Jewish life in Europe is, how long its history in either one of our countries, and how dissimilar in political outlook within the community. We wanted to move away from concentrating on the discrimination and hate we received (then as now) from all sides to a place of learning and understanding, and deep, honest and empathetic discussions. We were hoping that there would be an internal discourse with Muslim and specifically Palestinian Volters, and hoped to collectively build pragmatic peacemaking into our pan-European movement. We were full of hope. But uninformed one-sidedness, deeply rooted antisemitism and mindless populism destroyed all of that.

October 7th marked the one occasion where we needed our allies the most - where we needed our European leadership to understand the uniquely traumatic experience that was the terror Hamas unleashed. Or if condolences were impossible to convey, silence would have helped, in the face of an increasingly complex situation. Instead, our group and its members were attacked, vilified, our voices were not heard. In a time of crisis and emotional trauma, we tried to stay as objective as possible, stayed calm and collected, and still had to content with antisemitism. Antisemitism that if we called it out, led to us being shushed. Victim blaming became the norm, and despite all of us being torn between friends and family killed or hurt by the October 7 attacks, it was demanded of us to distance ourselves immediately from Israel. Most didn't know at all that the Jews & Allies group are NOT run by supporters of Netanyahu's autocratic regime and his fascist ministers; to the very contrary - many of us are invested in an end to occupation and discrimination, and want a liberal, open & inclusive Israel that lives in peace with its neighbors. Many in the group don't have any particular bonds with Israel, but some have friends and family there. But that doesn't count, there is no space for that. Jews active in Volt must either be staunch anti-zionists ad absurdum or have forfeited the right to speak up.

There is no space for Zionism in Volt, and by Zionism I mean the right for Jews to exist in their ancestral homeland in the middle east, a place from which many Jews have been ethnically cleansed, a place deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. A Zionism that I myself aim to critically deconstruct, a Zionism that sees and recognizes injustices and crimes, and calls them out. A Zionism that is tired of war and bloodshed, but tired also of excusing oneself for being a proud Jew in Israel or Europe. A Zionism that has been co-opted by right-wing politicians to cover up their racism and corruption. Zionism isn't just one word, one world - it's a myriad of ideas and ideals; none of which for me negate the right for Palestinians to live in safety and health, none of which sees any faith or people as supreme.

Many people in Volt only know about the Middle East through news and social media. Most of you have never been there, not lived there, and don't know what it's like to be a minority in either the Middle East or Europe. Most of you are not remotely interested in learning about the Jewish experience in Europe, its unique, beautiful and diverse history and deeply traumatic past. Most of you don't really care about Palestinians. Apart from the injustices perpetrated by Israel, Palestinians also suffer in Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan from oppressive regimes and are often second class citizens. Yet somehow this never really comes up from the crowd who so ardently fought for the Madellin crew, whose PR stunt didn't change a single thing for Palestinians on the ground in Gaza. Some of you don't have an idea what the word "Intifada" means not only to Israeli Jews, but to Christians, Druze and Muslims in Israel and abroad - a word that for me conjures suicide bombings, mass killings in discos, synagogues, bus stations and markets. Most of you have no idea that wherever you go in Europe, Jewish institutions, schools and synagogues have to be protected 24/7. Kids are used to playing behind bulletproof glass, high walls with barbed wire, and secured by officers with loaded assault rifles. This isn't paranoia, attacks against these places and the people in them are at an all time high. Not a day goes by that there isn't an attack against a Jewish institution or a Jewish person. We are always asked to hide our Jewishness, not speak Hebrew outside, don't mention where we live or where our synagogues are, and don't assemble without police support. If you want to live without fear, it conveys, hide your Jewishness. Don't you dare wear that Star of David around your neck, lest you want to attract physical harm - this is not an irrational fear but a lived experience by every Jew I know. This is nothing new and nothing particular, it has been going on as long as I live. Is this because of Israel, you think? Or is it because Europe never really worked on its own ingrained antisemitism, reflected on it and worked on it. But what do we expect, right? Sexism, Homophobia, Transphobia, Islamophobia and Racism are also still very alive and kicking in Europe and most don't care one iota to stop it above the occasional lip service.

I don't think Volt should stay silent on war crimes and human rights abuses. But I want Volt to do so in an informed fashion, understanding the contexts and complexity before jumping to conclusions, or more often than not, on a populist bandwagon. Volt should speak up about injustices that Israel perpetrates. But it should not turn a blind eye to the injustices perpetrated by its neighbors, or regimes of terror anywhere in the world, simply because it doesn't fit our worldview. I want Volt to speak up about the corrupt Israeli government and call it out for its hypocrisy. It's not antisemitism to do so. But your lack of basic empathy for the Jews in your midst, is.

The experience of the last couple years has been that of profound alienation. I find former allies turning against me - women and queer spaces both in Volt and outside, who are unable to acknowledge that young Israeli women were raped and killed as an act of terror. People who I value say unspeakable things without thinking. People who I respect assume the worst about me and my worldview without even asking once how I am doing and what I think about all of this misery. Volt was once a place that gave me a new community, a new circle of friends, and allies. A place where I wanted to challenge my assumptions, broaden my worldview and attack my own biases. I may not have succeeded in all of these, but as the years progressed, I found that Volt always took more than it gave back, and how much more so since the most recent onslaught of hate. I have stepped down from positions due to overwork and burnout, but at the time, I also still hoped that my relationship with Volt was salvageable.

It has become abundantly clear to me that my voice is no longer wanted in this movement. I have worked hard and brought people of all walks of life together, to professionalize the movement, to support and strengthen our processes, and to lead fruitful, pragmatic debates. I have often spent weekends and holidays for Volt, and have done so gladly. But when it came for Volt to listen to maybe not me, but voices like mine, that just asked for a tiny bit of understanding and reflection, silence ensued. I saw my friends leave the movement, I believed that maybe there was still hope, but instead there was only bullying, hate and vilification, from the highest positions in our movement to the new joiners.

I never wanted to be reduced to my Jewishness, never wanted this to be the most defining part of my identity at Volt. Yet somehow, I got pigeonholed into it because I had the audacity to speak up about discrimination. Except for a few transphobes in the party, I don't think many people remember that I headed the LGBTIAQ+ group and that we celebrated Volt Pride with members from all across the continent. Few will remember that I helped write the German electoral policy program for the 2021 elections, co-lead Smart State until my colleague and I got bullied out, or that I spent nights working on an AI policy. Those were the topics where I really wanted to make an impact. Yet when people talk about me, I am reduced and stylized into someone who calls everyone I don't like an antisemite. If you've ever spoken to me in your entire life, you would know that that's insane.

I no longer believe that Volt is the place where diverse voices are being cherished. Where dissent is something we celebrate, and where discrimination is given a swift and immediate end. All my closest friends have left the movement, some bullied out by anonymous DMs threatening their lives. I no longer feel safe in this movement, and I assume there are others that feel the same way.

I am hoping that this insight that I'm giving you can lead to change, to reflection, and to a new path forward. I am still hoping that Volt can turn things around. But you must do so without me.

Goodbye