He is one of the most important – and loudest – Jewish voices in Germany: Henryk M. Broder fights on his platform “Axis of Good”in newspaper columns and at events against anti-Semitism and for Israel’s right to exist. Astute, courageous and to the point. FokusIsrael.ch met the 79-year-old in Zurich and asked him nine questions about the war against the mullahs in Iran, Israel and anti-Semitism.

1. is the war against Iran necessary?

The war against Iran is not only necessary, but long overdue. If anything could be criticized about it, it would be that it was started too late or that the so-called “12-day war” was broken off after twelve days in the summer of 2025. Iran was given a chance, so to speak, to regroup and rearm.

And of course you can argue about whether the means and methods are right. But in principle, apart from Iran’s foreign policy, it is unacceptable that a regime has been in power for 47 years that massacres its own population.

I know that people who know something about international law say that international law safeguards the sovereignty of states. From that point of view, of course, you can’t attack a state just because it is harassing its own population. But I do think that international law, as it is structured today, does not serve to protect peoples, but to protect despots, tyrants and murderers.

In this respect, the war against Iran is necessary and right. And I hope that it comes to a good end, namely the defeat of the mullahs. Great ending, no.

2 How do you assess the reactions to this war?

Well, I live in Germany, and sometimes I think I’d rather live in Switzerland. But Switzerland is so orderly and so fantastically organized that I think I’d get psychosomatic complaints from boredom here.

The reactions in Germany are as they always are on such occasions. There are people who think it’s the right thing to do, including Bodo Ramelow, a well-known left-wing politician who was inadvertently Prime Minister of Thuringia for a while. He has said that we should have organized more chains of lights, because we know from history that chains of lights are the only way to impress despots. Then the

mullahs will probably resign voluntarily.

So, the reactions are very mixed. Part of the public thinks it’s right, it’s the smaller part, and the larger part is represented by our wonderful chancellor. Friedrich Merz quite rightly said several weeks or months ago that Israel is doing the dirty work for us. I think that’s amazing and right. And now he said a few days ago: this is not our war, we don’t want to take part in it.

And there were also counter-arguments. People have already tried to explain that it is our war after all. And in principle, however, it is not the case, as is often portrayed, that the reactions in Germany are centrally controlled. Everything that is happening in Germany is the result of large-scale chaos. There are no conspiracy theories, no dark forces.

And on the whole, as an observer of the reactions of my fellow Germans, I am actually quite satisfied. They already realize that you shouldn’t give the mullahs a chance. And once again: apart from Israel and all foreign policy issues – a regime that behaves like this towards its own people should be abolished.

3. is it possible to negotiate with Islamists?

In the last few days, I heard a German politician say that we should have negotiated with Iran.

I mean: they have been negotiating for decades. What was the result?

One of the most important European negotiators was our current Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. He was very pleased with the agreement at the time.

It didn’t last long. And today he says nothing more about it. He’s probably ashamed.

You can negotiate with anyone. You can also negotiate with Iran about the conditions under which Israel will be dissolved.

But you can’t really negotiate with Islamists. Because their goal is the destruction of the other.

And I am not prepared to negotiate with someone who wants to destroy me.

Either I flee – or I am stronger.

Negotiations only work from a position of strength. And that includes being prepared to use force.

4. after this war: chance of lasting peace in the Middle East?

I do not believe that what we are experiencing now is a prelude to eternal peace in the Middle East. It doesn’t even look like a far-reaching ceasefire. The conditions are not there.

One of the prerequisites for lasting peace would be the elimination of the Mullah regime. Strangely or fortunately, the Arab states are not a major problem at the moment. On the contrary: they are also being attacked by the mullahs.

And they have changed their attitude towards Israel over time, simply adapting to reality. They don’t have to love the Jews. It’s enough if they don’t want to destroy them. That’s all you have to ask.

I don’t think there will be peace in the foreseeable future. But at some point, conflicts come to an end.

How long did the Thirty Years’ War last? 30 years. And that was a very long time by the standards of the time.

There will be no overnight peace in the Middle East. But assuming the mullahs retire or are sent into retirement, there might be a chance of some kind of compromise.

But I don’t believe what I’ve just said myself. There’s too much at stake for the mullahs.

They are behaving like the Nazis behaved in the last weeks of their rule. They are lashing out left and right.

There is a very good movie with Bruno Ganz in the leading role: “Downfall”. In the last days of the war, the Nazis were still managing their empire, which is how the Iranians seem to me now: on the brink of the abyss, but still in high spirits.

5 Why has anti-Semitism been growing since the massacre of October 7, 2023?

There’s a saying that keeps doing the rounds in Germany, and I think it’s the same in Switzerland, that anti-Semitism has become socially acceptable again. It was never anything else.

Anti-Semitism did not start with the events in the Gaza Strip either. Anti-Semitism is a world cultural heritage, and not only in Germany and Central Europe. There are also peoples who are contaminated by anti-Semitism, who have never seen a Jew.

So there can be no question of “socially acceptable”.

What Jews – especially Jews – find difficult to understand is that anti-Semitism always comes in waves. It rages, then calms down a little, and then it comes to the surface again.

There is no period, no historical time without anti-Semitism. Only the intervals between outbreaks can vary.

Now we had – it looked like it – 80 years of peace, but the peace was deceptive because there was anti-Semitism during this time too.

I remember the comments after the Israelis dared to win the Six-Day War. The anti-Semitism that broke out in Germany opened my eyes.

The next big anti-Semitic wave was in 1976, I think, when an Air France plane was hijacked to Entebbe. How dare the Israelis? They send in a military unit and free the hostages. You don’t do that.

Any other country would have been allowed to do that, not the Jews.

So: anti-Semitism has not returned. It was always there. It’s just that, like a bear in winter, it sometimes goes into a dormant phase and then thaws out again.

6 How can we combat imported anti-Semitism?

So, if there’s one thing I’m really proud of, it’s this: I invented the term “imported

anti-Semitism”. I think it was in the summer of 2014 in an article for the BILD newspaper.

This was a relatively new development, because normally anti-Semitism feeds on indigenous sources. And there were always plenty of them.

But what have we done? What did our great former Chancellor do? She opened Germany’s borders wide. To be more precise, she refused to close the borders – they were open – and let in anyone who wanted to be let in.

There is a wonderfully apt phrase from Karl Lagerfeld. He got to the heart of the whole drama. He said: You can’t murder millions of Jews and then bring hundreds of thousands of their worst enemies into the country.

Yes, you can. But then you also have the consequences.

And the consequences are that Islamism is on the rise in Germany, that there are demonstrations openly calling for the caliphate, that this movement is getting stronger and stronger.

It is always said that we have a problem with migration. That’s not true. We don’t have a problem with migration as such. We have a problem with a specific type of migration, namely Arab-Muslim migration.

We have few or no problems with immigrants from other regions, for example from sub-Saharan Africa.

However, it is now a firmly held belief in Germany that Muslims are discriminated against and disadvantaged. If they are discriminated against and disadvantaged to such an extent, then I ask myself: why are they flocking to Germany in droves?

Why do they want to live and work here – or not work – instead of in one of their partner countries? Saudi Arabia must be very scenic. Or Afghanistan or Pakistan – countries with the same culture, the same tradition, the same food, the same God.

Why is the destination of migration Germany?

I can’t explain it. But it will mean our downfall.

7 Is the anti-Zionism of the left disguised hatred of Jews?

Another myth is that there is now a left-wing anti-Semitism. That is not true either. There has always been left-wing anti-Semitism, even in the labor movement. And the most famous left-wing anti-Semite was, of course, Karl Marx.

And left-wing anti-Semites still refer to him today. Others invoke the plight of the Third World and the fact that Israel is a colonial state. There are many justifications, but anti-Semitism is just as much at home on the left as it is on the right.

The right-wingers didn’t have fever dreams about Auschwitz either. They wanted to get rid of the Jews, but the idea of mass murder was relatively new. But the left also wanted to exclude the Jews from public life, but still gave them the chance to make a name for themselves as leftists.

This is why left-wing anti-Semitism is the ideal partner for right-wing anti-Semitism. Both serve different milieus.

There’s nothing you can do about it. You can’t do anything about a flu epidemic either. And everything that has been done against corona has only had limited success.

Anti-Semitism is an epidemic or a pandemic. And like a pandemic, it comes and goes.

The only thing that can be done about it, at least in theory, is to ensure that Israel is, becomes or remains a strong country. There is nothing else we can do.

The diaspora is not important at all. Even if many Jews believe that they are important for Israel – no: Israel is important for us.

8 Why do cultural workers sympathize with Palestinians?

One driver of postmodern anti-Semitism is the cultural milieu.

I ask myself: why are there always open letters from creative artists, but never from car mechanics? Why don’t bakers or butchers speak out about the Middle East conflict?

Because arrogance, overconfidence and delusions of grandeur are typical intellectual diseases.

A baker can’t afford that. He has to get up at three in the morning and work.

The cultural milieu expresses itself selectively: it remains silent about the Uyghurs in China, the massacres in Sudan or the persecution of Christians in Nigeria.

But with Israel, it’s suddenly very loud.

There is a strange relationship with the Jews: a mixture of closeness and paternalism.

The Jews are told how to behave.

A popular phrase is: “Why haven’t the Jews learned anything from history?”

While the same people would refuse to do military service and would rather be rolled over than take responsibility themselves.

This is a disease.

There’s a clever saying by Dieter Bohlen: “The problem is to make a crazy person realize that he’s crazy.”

I have been trying for decades to make it clear to these left-wing intellectuals that they are wrong. With limited success.

I think my middle name is not Moses, but Sisyphus.

I probably deserve that.

9 Do Jews still have a future in Europe?

I don’t know whether Jews have a future in Europe. I agree with Karl Valentin:

predictions are difficult, especially when they concern the future.

My educated friends prefer to make statements about the past rather than predictions about the future.

Judaism has always somehow muddled through, survived every catastrophe and every downfall. But I believe that times are different today.

I believe that Judaism will survive in its small, radical form in Europe – Orthodox Judaism. But bourgeois, liberal, secular Judaism will look for another place.

Normal people do not like to live in constant danger.

I also don’t like it when I want to go to a synagogue and have to pass several police stations. That’s not a sign of normality.

And then German politicians, who have obviously been smoking too much pot, come along and praise the wonderful resurgence of Jewish culture in Germany just because they were at a klezmer concert last week.

Jewish culture in Germany also means that Jews are bullied in schoolyards, that they don’t dare go out on the street wearing a kippah, and that there are certain parts of the city that they are better off not walking through.

That is the present. And the future won’t get any better.

I don’t think there has ever been a development that has proven to be reversible. Crises often end in catastrophes.

After 1945, Germany could not return to the Germany of before 1933. And it will not become calmer for Jews either.

The Jews are and remain what they have always been: the eternal scapegoats.

And that also applies to Israel today.

I don’t remember exactly who said that – either Léon Poliakov or Jean-Paul Sartre: Israel is the Jew among the nations.

Everything that is said against Jews in anti-Semitism is said against Israel today.

The anti-Semite doesn’t care what the Jew does. He is bothered by the fact that he exists.

And it is the same with Israel: even if Israel consisted only of the Tel Aviv beach promenade, the Ayatollahs would want to destroy it.

Israel is disturbing because it exists.

Even if only Nobel Prize winners lived there, nothing would change.

I believe Israel has a future. I believe it will prevail. But I don’t believe that Europe will remain a Jewish model place.

In Israel, the Jews are no longer victims. The women don’t look like Anne Frank, the men don’t look like the old pictures. They no longer have that victim look.

They are normal Jews – self-confident, cheeky, challenging.

Judaism in Europe, on the other hand, will retreat to small oases.

And if that’s the future, then I can’t see it.