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Belgium long has been known as a tolerant, fun-loving country. Its winter carnivals are famed around the world, so a float in the town of Aalst outside of Brussels featured the grinning figures of Orthodox Jews standing on large piles of money may have looked to the organisers just like a joke.

Unfortunately, this float is neither funny nor, sadly, a first. The same sick sense of humour already was on display in 2013 when the Aalst parade included a display of SS killers with concentration camp victims. At this year's parade, marchers wore KKK outfits and spectators with blackface watched. What's new is how this year's anti-Semitic float comes straight from the Nazi anti-Semitic bible *Der Stürmer*, echoing Nazi codes in a way that borders on incitement.

Perhaps most upsetting about the entire incident is the astounding reaction - or rather - the **lack** of reaction from Belgium's leaders. Once informed of the hurt caused, the float's builders, a fireman, a technician, an Education Ministry official and a police department employee, to name a few, didn't apologise. They said [it was funny](#). Aalst's mayor, Flemish nationalist Christophe D'Haese, defended them. No leading Belgian politician offered any criticism, even though it is hard to see what would be the political downside in doing so.

In contrast, kudos go to the European Commission, which immediately issued a statement saying it was "unthinkable that these images parade in European streets 74 years after the Shoah," adding "in the last century, we saw it once and we know how this film ends - and nobody wants to see this film replayed." UNESCO, which in 2010 added the event to its "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" list, belatedly condemned the display.

The Carnival clash is just the latest sign of a worrying rise of anti-Semitism throughout Europe. [Cries of "dirty Jew"](#) during Yellow Jackets protests in France, [anti-Semitic posters](#) condemning Hungarian-American philanthropist George Soros in Hungary, [a row](#) over anti-Semitic remarks that threatens to tear the Labour Party apart in the U.K. — these are all part of the same worrying trend.

While the rest of Europe has suffered from the rise of right-wing populism and left-wing extremism, Belgium has, for the most part, remained immune. Our [recently-released report](#) on Holocaust Revisionism showed Belgium making significant progress in education and acknowledging the complicity of its collaborators, the majority of whom came from the Flemish community.

It seems we were far too optimistic and we will review our Belgian rating. Others should take action too. UNESCO should not limit itself to verbal criticism but kick the Aalst Carnival off its Cultural Humanity list. Belgian politicians should finally wake up and realise that this kind of carnival display has no place in a modern democracy.

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