

Wednesday, 12 December 2007 - Strasbourg

Combating the rise of extremism in Europe (debate)

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE). - (PT) On 6 September some twenty graves in the Jewish cemetery in Lisbon were desecrated and swastikas painted on the headstones. The two perpetrators were arrested. They are members of the Frente Nacional or National Front, an extreme right-wing Portuguese skinhead organisation which openly advocates racial war and violent action to secure white supremacy. This case and others, notably the wave of anti-Muslim hysteria in various European countries and the racist violence recently unleashed against the Roma community in Italy, show that xenophobia and violent racism are with us and we cannot afford the luxury of minimising them.

In the Portuguese case, the authorities were initially tempted to play the case down and declare that anti-Semitism was contrary to the supposedly tolerant nature of Portuguese society. But the presence of the Ministers for Justice and Internal Administration at the Jewish cemetery for the ceremonial purification of the graves and the publicity this demonstration of solidarity received in the Portuguese media are a lesson for other cases in Portugal and elsewhere. Extremism in Europe can only be fought effectively if the political representatives and the media assume their responsibilities by giving visibility to crimes of this type and identifying them as direct and base attacks on the very essence of democracy, of Europe and of Humanity.