France's Macron calls for change in law following Sarah Halimi ruling

April 19, 2021

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The Jerusalem Post

<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/frances-macron-calls-for-change-in-law-following-sarah-halimi-ruling-665630>

French President Emmanuel Macron called for a change in the law after the highest French court of appeals ruled last week that the murderer of Sarah Halimi could not be held criminally accountable for his actions since he took cannabis before he committed his crime.

“Deciding to take drugs and then 'becoming mad' should not in my eyes remove your criminal responsibility,” Macron told Le Figaro in an interview published on Sunday.

“On this topic, I would like the minister of justice to submit a change to the law as soon as possible,” the president continued.

“It is not for me to comment on a court decision, but I would like to tell the family, relatives of the victim and all fellow citizens of the Jewish faith who were awaiting this trial of my warm support and the determination of the Republic to protect them," said Macron.

His comments come as welcome news to the French Jewish community which was deeply angered by the ruling of France’s Court of Cassation.

In April 2017, Kobili Traoré, a 27-year-old Muslim man, beat Halimi, his 65-year-old Jewish neighbor, while screaming "Allahu Akbar" (God is great) and antisemitic slogans before throwing her out of the window of her third-floor apartment to her death.

A lower court ruled in December 2019 that Traoré was not criminally responsible for his actions since his heavy intake of cannabis supposedly compromised his “discernment,” or consciousness.

The Court of Cassation upheld this ruling last week.

Macron’s comments come following outrage amongst the French Jewish community over the court’s ruling, and statements by Jewish leaders that they intend to lobby for a change in the law.

A demonstration is being planned by several Jewish organizations for this coming Sunday in the central Paris location of the Place Du Trocadero to protest the ruling.

Yonthan Arfi, vice president of the CRIF umbrella group of French Jewish communities, condemned the ruling, saying it left a gaping hole in the ability of the state to combat hate crimes.

Although he conceded that there would be no further possibility of having Traoré convicted and punished, he said that CRIF would be fighting on two fronts to redress the problem more broadly.

Arfi said that CRIF would be conducting an awareness campaign about her murder, and ensure that her story becomes familiar with the general public and civil society.

Secondly, he said that the organization would seek a change in the law so that individuals are still criminally responsible for their actions even if they have taken drugs.

“We are starting to build a consensus on this idea. Many people in France consider it natural that if you drink wine and get in a car crash you are responsible for losing control of your car,” said Arfi.

He said that such a bill has not yet been submitted to the French parliament but that numerous members of parliament have expressed support for such an amendment law.

“This crime was symbolic of the new antisemitism. The perpetrator was a Muslim, he was praying to Allah while murdering her. He was radicalized with a radical Islamist vision, and he knew she was Jewish, so we cannot accept that the antisemitic part of this crime will be erased from the collective memory of Sarah Halimi in French society,” said Arfi.