Could anti-Semitism in France make its way by means of forces legally established in the political system? We have already seen that in Alsace the extreme right does offer an affirmative answer to the question, although it is cautious and limited. Another specificity of the region, unique to France, is that it is the stronghold of a political party claiming to represent Islam, the Party of Muslims of France (the PMF—Parti des musulmans de France), founded in 1997 at the time of the general elections when it won 0.65% of votes cast. Now the leader of the party, Mohammed Latrèche, uses language with strong anti-Semitic connotations.

The general public had the opportunity to make his acquaintance on 17 January 2004 when he took the initiative and organised a big demonstration in Paris in favour of the wearing of the Muslim headscarf in state schools. But the inhabitants of Strasbourg have known him for some time, first as a politico-religious leader and then as founder of the PMF. Despite the fact that he is not in any way representative, his action has made him a well-known figure: he has organised demonstrations in Strasbourg (where chants of ‘Death to the Jews’ were heard for the first time since World War II), then in Paris; he participated in the ‘human shield’ operation in Iraq in support of Saddam Hussein when the second Gulf War was declared and, along with other militants of the radical ‘anti-Zionist’ cause, was associated with the publication of the Judeo-Nazi Manifesto of Ariel Sharon. Mohammed Latrèche has no hesitation in being seen in public with figures who also smack of the heresy of hatred of the Jews, Serge Thion, the notorious negationist and friend of Robert Faurisson, Hervé Van Laethem, the leader of the Belgian ultra right, Nation, with whom he went to Iraq, or Ferdinand Moschenross, a familiar figure on the Alsatian separatist scene. He spent seven years in Syria where he seems to have formed relations in the upper echelons. His action is supposed to be not local (to Strasbourg) or regional (Alsace) but national, if not international, and at the moment there are as many Parisians as residents of Strasbourg among the active
militants of the PMF. But he does truly constitute an important figure in the ‘game’ being played out in Strasbourg and in Alsace.

Mohammed Latrèche is the worst nightmare of the Jewish community in Strasbourg. Mme A. expresses the fear which he arouses:

[...] you know very well that all it needs is for some crackpot to decide to take action… It is well-known that in some of the mosques here, the message, the slogan is: ‘anyone who kills a Jew is doing a good deed’ [...]. I have had to do battle with Mohammed Latrèche [...]. Mohammed Latrèche is simply dreaded, here, even amongst [...]. My husband teaches in the university. A Muslim colleague told him that he is a person to be feared.

The demonstrations which he organised in Strasbourg—one of which was prevented at the last moment from passing in front of the synagogue de la Paix, in the heart of the ‘Jewish neighbourhood’—had an impact which was more than symbolic. The leaders of the CRIF indicated that calls for murder chanted by the crowds led by Latrèche were followed by anti-Semitic acts:

M. U.:—After the PMF demonstrations which are vicious demonstrations, there is regularly damage to Jewish institutions for a few days, whether it be in the cemeteries, or stone-throwing, graffiti and so on. There are regularly consequences.

Mme. L….:—There are also attacks!

The man and his capacity to mobilise—the extent of which is however difficult to estimate with any kind of precision—creates a climate of fear in the Jewish community. It must be said that Mohammed Latrèche does impress observers with his outstanding qualities of organisation, as witness the demonstrations launched by the PMF: the stewards are impressive as are the number and diversity of the participants. The daily newspaper, L’Alsace thus reported the presence, during a demonstration in support of the Palestinian cause, of people who had come by bus from Mulhouse, Paris and also from Belgium and Germany.2

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1 The term was used in significant fashion by Robert Spieler who told us: “Mohammed Latrèche, who is someone extremely intelligent and talented and who has also played this game very skilfully”.

2 L’Alsace, 1 April 2002, “Palestine: trois mille manifestants à Strasbourg”.