# Swiss fencing team apologises after refusing to face Israeli flag in medal row



At the European U23 Fencing Championship held in Estonia on Saturday, a controversy arose during the medal ceremony when the Swiss under-23 fencing team, which had secured the silver medal, refused to face the Israeli flag as the Israeli national anthem played. Israel took the gold medal, while Italy claimed bronze at the event.

During the awards presentation, footage showed the Swiss team standing facing forward, unlike their Israeli and Italian counterparts, who turned sideways to face their national flags. This action was widely interpreted on social media as a deliberate protest by the Swiss athletes.

The Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar publicly criticised the Swiss team’s conduct, posting on the social media platform X: "Shame on the Swiss team for their disrespectful behaviour. You don't know how to lose and behaved in a manner which is an embarrassment to you and the country you're supposed to represent."

Following this, the four Swiss fencers involved—Ian Hauri, Theo Brochard, Jonathan Fuhrimann, and Sven Vineis—issued a joint apology on Instagram. They explained that their decision to not turn towards the Israeli flag was "not political" and was not intended as a sign of disrespect towards Israel. Rather, they sought to express "our grief and empathy with regard to the great human suffering of the civilian population, which affects all sides in this conflict."

The Swiss team acknowledged that their actions caused "irritation" and admitted they had made a mistake. They apologised "to everyone whose feelings we have hurt – especially our opponents from the Israeli fencing team and the Israeli Fencing Federation." They concluded their statement by saying they would "learn from this situation and exercise better judgement in the same or similar moments in the future."

Switzerland’s Ambassador to Tel Aviv, Simon Geissbühler, condemned the athletes’ behaviour stating: "This action was not discussed with anyone in advance. We will confront the athletes upon their return and then decide on the next steps." The Swiss Fencing Association also issued an apology on Sunday and indicated that it was evaluating whether further measures would be necessary.

Yael Arad, chair of the Israel Olympic Committee and a member of the International Olympic Committee, commented on the apology by saying it was "highly significant from an educational, sporting, and diplomatic standpoint." She added, "Raising the Israeli flag on the world stage through Israeli excellence is our way – and we will continue on this path."

The European Fencing Federation is reported to have issued a warning to the Swiss team, but it remains unclear if any additional sanctions will be imposed.

This incident echoes similar political tensions in international fencing. In May 2023, the Iraqi national fencing team withdrew from a World Fencing Championship match against Israel in Istanbul. The Iraqi Fencing Federation cited compliance with a law criminalising normalisation with Israel and expressed solidarity with the Palestinian cause as reasons for their withdrawal.

The Daily Mail is reporting on this event as an example of how geopolitical issues have occasionally intersected with international sporting competitions.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14665057/Moment-defeated-Swiss-fencers-refuse-face-Israeli-flag-European-championship-medal-ceremony-empathy-great-human-suffering.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data