90-year-old Jewish man allegedly pushed to his death in Lyon, France

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A dispute between neighbors in France ended with the death of a 90-year-old Jewish man, according to police, who do not suspect an antisemitic motive.

Police arrested a 51-year-old neighbor of the deceased, René Hadjaj, sometime after Hadjaj’s death on Tuesday evening outside his home in Lyon in eastern France, the Tribune Juive Jewish newspaper reported on Friday. The suspect had pushed Hadjaj to his death from an elevated story of their residential building, prosecutors told Le Progrès, a local newspaper.

Le Progrès reported that police had initially investigated a possible antisemitic motive but have now excluded it. They believe the incident was the result of an argument that was unconnected to the fact that Hadjdaj was Jewish. French media have not reported the identity of the suspect or other details about him.

Reports about the incident Friday evoked anger and disbelief among multiple French Jews on social networks and beyond.

Elements of the case are reminiscent of the death of Sarah Halimi in 2017. Her neighbor, Kobili Traore, killed her and threw her body from the window of her third-story apartment while he shouted about Allah.

A French court said he acted out of antisemitic motives but deemed Traore unfit to stand trial. He had smoked large amounts of marijuana that triggered a psychotic episode, making him not criminally responsible for his actions at the time of Halimi’s slaying, the court said last year. The crime and its aftermath led to a series of protests.

More recently, a Jewish man died in a suburb of Paris after running into the path of a passing tram while escaping a group of individuals on the street.

The death of Jérémie Cohen in February was initially treated as an accident until his family recovered footage of the assault. The family gave the evidence to Éric Zemmour, a far-right French Jewish politician, who highlighted the case in his presidential campaign last month