



# Working Group on Antisemitism

## 3<sup>RD</sup> MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL DECLARATION ON THE FIGHT AGAINST ANTISEMITISM

### SPEECH: VICE-PRESIDENT VĚRA JOUROVÁ

This third meeting of the Working Group comes at a moment where discrimination and racism is high on the political agenda given the demonstrations and reactions following the tragic death of George Floyd. They show that racism and discrimination remain challenges for our societies, both in the US but also in Europe, and that we need to continue to address it in a meaningful way. Occasions like this working group will help us design strategies, share experience and stand by our principles.

#### **[Disinformation and conspiracy myths]**

- The Coronavirus pandemic has been accompanied by a wave of disinformation and consumer hoaxes. Disinformation does not Working Group on Antisemitism only harm the health of our democracies, it also harms the health of our citizens and their wellbeing.
- Scapegoating Jewish communities has been a despicable hallmark of pandemics from the past to the present, also when hidden behind terms like Zionists, Israel or George Soros.
- Conspiracies carry a particular threat for our society because they undermine trust in institutions, in the rule of law and in societal coherence.

- Conspiracy myths are not innocent. They may not be illegal, but they **are the gateway to radicalization** as we have seen in the lethal attacks in Halle, and before in Pittsburgh and Christchurch. The path from conspiracies to hate crime is short.
- 30% **increase of antisemitic** hate speech in March as compared to November 2019 (reported by the World Jewish Congress) tell us clearly that we have to act and must be prepared for the day when confinement is definitely lifted.

### **[COM actions on disinformation and hate speech]**

- The **Code of Conduct on illegal hate speech online** has been our immediate response and it provides stable results for removing illegal content by social media companies.
- Last week I presented together with HR/VP Josep Borrel the Commission's response to disinformation in COVID times, conspiracy myths and online interference from third countries, in particular Russia and China.
- It addresses the sources of disinformation, its channels or amplifiers, and the targets.
- **As to the sources:** We have exposed more than 550 disinformation narratives stemming from foreign interference. We are aware that foreign interference and spreading conspiracies from outside the EU impacts on Jewish communities inside the EU.
- We also see how right-wing extremists have fueled conspiracy myths, including antisemitic ones, and how they manage to influence public discourse. We must better understand these networks and have launched a study into **far-right networks online** as they act transnationally and influence globally.
- **The channels and amplifiers:** I welcome strong measures taken by platforms to fight harmful content while preserving freedom of information and expression.
- But platforms need to do more. We know only as much as platforms tell us. They have to open up and offer more evidence that the measures they have taken are working well. They also have to enable the public to identify new threats independently. We invite them now to **provide monthly reports** with more

granular information than ever before.

- It is also crucial to remove the financial incentives for those who want to benefit from disinformation, therefore we are taking action to gain better understanding of the flow of advertising revenues linked to disinformation. Extremist and antisemitic influencers, like Dieudonné in France, don't spread their hatred only for fun but for financial gain. **Antisemitism online thrives also because it sells.**
- And now to the targets, us the citizens. We need to make our societies more resilient and more critical.
- This is why we support fact checkers and independent media who play a key role in this.
- At the beginning of this month (1 June) the Commission launched the **European Digital Media Observatory** to support **fact-checkers and researchers** in tackling disinformation by providing an independent platform. Later this month we will launch a call for EUR 9 mln for the research hubs.
- With the disinformation Communication of last week we took first steps that will help us to design the flagship initiatives of this Commission when it comes to platform accountability and resilience of democracies, the Digital Services Act and the European Democracy Action Plan.
- At the beginning of June, we launched a public consultation for the **Digital Service Act which will include regulations for online platforms**. I invite you to contribute to the public consultation to shape the digital environment we want.
- We will also work to adapt to the evolving threats, to strengthen our democracies against disinformation and external interference. This is the aim of the upcoming **European Democracy Action Plan**. (And I am convinced that antisemitism is a threat to democracy.)
- We will strive to create a more resilient and democratic information ecosystem, based on fundamental rights and respect for freedom of expression, with clear legislation for digital players.

- This will show that our democracy is the superior system to address such challenges and safeguard the fundamental rights of all its citizens.
- Truth and trust matter.