



**European Commission – Speech
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Speech by President Ursula von der Leyen at the American Jewish Committee Virtual Global Forum 2021

Brussels, 9 June 2021

Dear David Harris,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am so honoured to speak at this year's American Jewish Committee Virtual Global Forum.

As a German, this is a very special occasion for me. Because the AJC has been at the forefront of re-establishing the Jewish community's relationship with Germany. Only three years after the end of the war, the AJC was the first global Jewish organization to engage. That was even before the Federal Republic of Germany had been founded. In addition, the AJC has been a strong supporter of the European Union and of the NATO alliance ever since.

Today the AJC has regional offices covering all countries across Europe. In particular, the AJC's Transatlantic Institute, here in Brussels, plays an important role in our conversations with Israel and across the Atlantic.

I know, dear David Harris, how much of this has been your work in the 31 years that you have been at the helm of the AJC. I have been lucky to meet you in person several times in Berlin and in New York. Therefore I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, wholeheartedly, for the excellent work you have been doing.

Dear David,

you are the son of two Holocaust survivors. And you have dedicated your life to the AJC's mission, YOUR mission: To fight antisemitism and racism, to promote Jewish life, and to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. We are so privileged, to be able to work with partners like you! Today your fight - our fight - against antisemitism is more urgent than ever. Antisemitism is on the rise across Europe – and in the United States. Recent studies show that antisemitic incidents in the US are at their highest level since the 1980s. And both sides of the Atlantic have recently seen terrorist

attacks. I am thinking of the victims in Pittsburgh as well as in Halle and Paris. My thoughts are with the victims and with all the families, who lost their loved ones.

These attacks are a stark reminder of how dangerous antisemitism is for our society. It is a poison for our democratic values, and an attack on our way of life.

We must fight it together. And we have to eradicate it.

Europe and the US have since long joined forces, when it comes to fighting antisemitism. And we will continue to do so. At the United Nations General Assembly, together with the US, Canada and Israel, the EU hosted side events addressing the fight against antisemitism. And in 2019, we co-sponsored the Informal General Assembly on antisemitism. Because we are strongly committed to building a future free of antisemitism – in Europe and beyond.

After taking office as Commission President in 2019, I stepped up Europe's fight against antisemitism. This is why, later this year, the Commission will adopt its first-ever "EU strategy on combatting antisemitism and fostering Jewish life". With this we first want to strengthen our fight against antisemitism.

Second, we want to preserve the memory of past atrocities. All European students should learn about the Holocaust – no matter their background, family history or country of origin.

And third, we want to foster Jewish life in Europe in all its diversity. We want to make sure that Jews are free to follow their religious and cultural traditions.

Let me assure you: we will make this strategy ambitious.

Jewish life is part of our societies and we are determined to protect it. We are immensely glad, that 76 years after the Holocaust, Jewish life is thriving again – in schools and kindergartens, in synagogues, and in fashionable kosher restaurants. In the heart of our communities. We will never allow this to be threatened again.

This EU strategy comes on top of what we have already initiated. This January, the Commission together with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance published a Handbook for the practical use of their working definition of antisemitism. With this, we aim to support policy makers, judges, prosecutors – and teachers in recognizing antisemitic bias in their daily work. Because, to be able to eradicate antisemitism, you need to be able to identify every manifestation of it - including where it is subtle and insidious.

We also need to put a stop to hatred and antisemitism on the internet. Disinformation and the denial of facts are everywhere online. The Covid-19 pandemic in particular has shown how quickly antisemitic conspiracy myths can spread. With our Digital Services Act we make clear that online platforms have a crucial role in disseminating and promoting antisemitic material. And they must

take greater responsibility. Because not only individuals, but also every business – especially powerful tech giants – have to combat hatred and to stand for historical truth.

Remembering the Shoah is our shared responsibility. But today, the last survivors are leaving us. And for many of our young people, the events of the Holocaust seem to belong to a distant past. Some have never even heard of Auschwitz.

This is why the European Commission has significantly increased the budget for preventing and addressing antisemitism, and fostering Jewish life. And we will also take action if European money is used to call into question Israel's right to exist. Israel is a vitally important country for the European Union. Not only because of our common past, but also because of our common future. The pandemic has brought Israel and the EU even closer together.

We congratulate Israel on its rapid and effective vaccination campaign. It is so good to see the vibrant cafes in Tel Aviv open again. And to see life coming back to Israeli cities and beaches. We are happy, that Europe has been able to contribute to this success. We know, that in this pandemic, we are only safe if our neighbours are safe as well. In this spirit, Europe has exported almost as many doses of vaccine as it delivered to its own citizens. 12.5 million of these doses that European companies exported have gone to Israel.

This is how friendship is supposed to be: It is strongest in adversity.

I sincerely hope that with our successful vaccination campaigns, Israeli and European citizens will soon be able to visit each other again – for example with the help of the Israeli Green Passport and the EU Digital COVID certificate. Together we want to build forward better. With its recovery programme NextGenerationEU, the European Union will invest in a greener and more digital future. For this, Israel is an important partner.

For example, as recently as April, the European Investment Bank supported with 7.5 million Euro a very interesting project. It is the first manufacturing plant for innovative thermal energy storage systems in Israel. This technology can be key for a green and sustainable energy system in the EU as well.

We also want to step up our cooperation, when it comes to digitalisation and innovation. Europe can learn from Israel's successes. We Europeans are excellent in making science with money. But we are not so good in making money out of science. Israel is known for quickly translating scientific breakthroughs into business opportunities. Let's exchange the best ideas and learn from each other!

Our vibrant partnership rests on a firm foundation. Some weeks ago, on April 25th, we celebrated 25 years of cooperation in science and innovation with Israel. Israel is a key partner in Horizon 2020, our EU research programme. Altogether, Israeli scientists and organisations have participated so far in 2100 projects under Horizon 2020.

One of these projects I find especially intriguing is the so called Sniffphone. Researchers of the Israeli Institute for Technology, with the help of EU funding, have developed a smart-phone-type of device that measures exhaled breath for early diagnosis of cancer. The Sniffphone was even awarded the EU Commission's prize of most innovative project in 2018. And just recently, the EU granted another 18 million euro to nine Israeli companies for research in Covid-19.

Let's build on this success and continue for the next 7 years in the new innovation and research program Horizon Europe.

When I look back at the past we have come from, I sometimes think, that it is precisely this normality that makes our successful common journey to date so special.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

the late US supreme court judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg once said and I quote: *"Fight for the things that you care about. But do it in a way that will lead others to join you."*

For me, this quote sums up the mission of the AJC in the best possible manner. And it describes why the AJC has been so successful for such a long time. You care about what you fight for. You never give up on your mission. And you have a the unique ability to foster friendships around the word.

Many of those friends are here today in your Virtual Global Forum.

And I am happy to be one of them.

Thank you!