

# COMBATING ANTISEMITISM FOSTERING JEWISH life



## FINAL REPORT

### 2<sup>ND</sup> MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU STRATEGY ON COMBATING ANTISEMITISM AND FOSTERING JEWISH LIFE

BRUSSELS  
1 – 2 June 2022

## INTRODUCTION

On 5 October 2021 the European Commission adopted the first EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life. In full respect of national competences, the strategy sets out the policy framework for the Commission for the period 2021-2030.

In line with the EU Strategy, Member States committed in the Council Conclusions on combating racism and antisemitism of 4 March 2022, adopted under the French Presidency, to developing national strategies against antisemitism and endeavour to do so by the end of 2022. The second meeting of the Working Group aimed to further support the development of these national strategies, and focused on relevant topics that Member States are encouraged to cover in them.

Amongst others, the recently adopted Council Conclusions and the EU Strategy call for the development of a common methodology for recording antisemitic incidents and for increased efforts to ensure the security of Jewish communities, especially areas around religious institutions, places of worship and Jewish schools, and during cultural and religious events. Two sessions during the working were dedicated to these topics.

Furthermore, the working group discussed the antisemitic narratives and disinformation used by Russia as justification for its invasion of Ukraine, specifically allusions to 'Nazi' leadership in Ukraine and genocide carried out by Ukrainians, while the situation of the Ukrainian Jewish community was also discussed.

This report reflects the discussions that took place in the different sessions. The information and views in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.





The false Nazification narrative led to a banalisation of the Nazi era in Russia even before the invasion of Ukraine, according to one speaker. Moreover, in the three months before the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by Russia the use of the term ‘Nazi’ spiked by 290% and the word ‘genocide’ by 500% in Russian media channels. Other speakers also highlighted that the narratives driven by the Kremlin can be very convincing, dividing families. Much depends on the media channels being consumed, with one speaker pointing out that Russians who only speak their native language are particularly receptive to these false narratives. It was also noted that Russian disinformation about the Jewish community has worsened since the invasion.

Speakers agreed that to successfully combat these false narratives it is important to occupy the information space. Simply monitoring and evaluating what is going on is not enough. In the long-run the Digital Services Act could be a game changer regarding fighting online hate speech and disinformation. It was further mentioned that one way of combating false narratives is to address the algorithms of social media sites that reinforce users’ views.

Russian propaganda is an attack on our democratic values, concluded a final speaker. Yet this propaganda is finding traction in the global south, and we need to reflect on how to counteract that.

Jewish communities in Europe have welcomed refugees from all backgrounds, with Poland now home to around 3.5m refugees from Ukraine. It was noted that the public’s response stands in stark contrast to other refugee crises.

## **Session II: Tour-de-table with updates from Member States and Jewish communities on national strategies and other actions**

**Katharina von Schnurbein, European Commission coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life** kicked off the session by welcoming the pledges made by Member States at the Malmö international forum on Holocaust remembrance and combating antisemitism organised by the Swedish government last October. She said that these pledges should become an integral part of the national strategies that are currently being drawn up.

**Sarah Schlitz, secretary of state for gender equality, equal opportunities and diversity in Belgium**, emphasised that Belgium remains deeply concerned about the rise of antisemitism in Belgium, elsewhere in the EU and the world. She reminded delegates of the attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels in which four people lost their lives eight years ago. The Belgium action plan to combat racism is being developed and will include several measures that contribute against antisemitism.

In the tour-de-table Member States gave updates on the development of their national strategies on combating antisemitism. The Commission encourages the Member States to develop holistic strategies that mainstream the fight against antisemitism in all relevant policy areas. The tour-the-table showed that the strategies currently being developed by the Member States contain a number of key common elements:

- Adoption of IHRA definition as a basis for reporting antisemitic incidents
- Establishment of working groups that are inter-ministerial, recognising that antisemitism is a cross-cutting issue
- Renewed efforts to strengthen relationships with Jewish communities, prioritising their contributions to the development of the strategy and its implementation
- Training of law enforcement agencies and educators to increase recognition of antisemitism
- Reinforcement of remembrance of the Holocaust, including the creation of museums and the protection of memorials
- Improved security of places of worship and schools
- Efforts to combat hate speech (including antisemitism) online



- Improved reporting of incidents by increasing trust among Jewish communities and coordination between different sources of information
- Appointing a Special Envoy or Coordinator on combating antisemitism to facilitate joined efforts among different levels of government and to strengthen dialogue with Jewish communities

**Vice-President of the European Parliament, Nicola Beer**, praised the progress made at EU and Member State level in recent years. She said that she was shocked when she hears about young Jews thinking of leaving Europe because of not feeling safe. Important topics to be addressed in strategies include protecting and fostering Jewish life, online antisemitism, education and sports. She emphasized that combating antisemitism is important for all the groups of the European Parliament.

Efforts should be made on not just combating antisemitism, but just as importantly on fostering Jewish life on a European level. In too many Member States, Jewish cultural and religious practices (such as animal slaughter according to Jewish customs) are being questioned and in some cases legislation is being proposed or exists that make them impossible. But these practices are not outdated; they are crucial and discussion is needed on how to make them possible. If not, this could lead to an exodus of young people.

In cooperation with the Austrian Jewish community she will start a European wide network of parliamentarians to address antisemitism.

## THURSDAY, 2 JUNE 2022

### **Jitka Látal Znamenáčková, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the Political and Security Committee of the EU**

The ambassador highlighted that antisemitism will be a priority for the Czech presidency of the Council. Some 80% of antisemitic incidents are online, representing a huge challenge for law enforcement. Nevertheless, non-reporting remains a problem that must be tackled. She emphasized the importance of debunking falsehoods and disinformation, including online.

The International Terezín Declaration Conference will be organized in Prague on Thursday 3 November 3, 2022 as one of the main events during the Czech Presidency of the European Union. The event is a follow-up to the Terezín Declaration Conference in 2009.

Furthermore, as part of its Presidency, the Czech Republic is planning an event in Brussels on online antisemitism and will aim for a discussion on the development of the national strategies and the implementation of the EU strategy. The Czech Republic is currently in the process of developing a national strategy, which will focus on security, education and remembrance and focus on fostering Jewish life.

### **Session III: The security needs of the Jewish community**

Speakers agreed that online hate translates into offline violence. Security is a priority in the EU Strategy and the Commission is investing in the protection of places of worship, including synagogues and Jewish schools. The Commission will amongst others organise a high-level conference on the protection of Jewish communities and continue to finance research and innovation activities. It also makes available operational support for Member States and Jewish communities by providing training on security measures. The Radicalisation Awareness Network recently organised a dedicated event on how antisemitism contributes to radicalisation.



Improved intelligence can protect against 90% of planned attacks, remarked one speaker. He noted that without proper security measures, Jewish life can't continue, but added that funding often comes from the US and that EU Member States therefore must step up.

It was highlighted that all knowledge to improve the security of Jewish communities is available, and that it is really about political will. As an example, ODHIR developed a blueprint of 10 steps on how Jewish communities and law enforcement agencies can work together. Know-how on improving the security of Jewish communities is available, and this needs to be put in place before the next attack happens, not as a response after.

Denmark was held up as an example of good practice. The country identified six pillars of security: political leadership; security organisation; physical security; crisis management; community awareness; and local authorities. It was mentioned that €8.7m is spent annually on Jewish security in Denmark.

The concept of the House of One, a religious building in Berlin that comprises a synagogue, mosque and church, was presented. While creating an inviting ambiance, security issues are at the forefront of the building's design – from the height of windows to the routes of access. This concept is called 'security-by-design', however, it was emphasised that it is hard to find experts in this field.

#### **Session IV: Developing a common methodology on recording antisemitic incidents**

Austria hosted on 17-18 May a European conference on combating antisemitism, where a group of Member States signed the 'Vienna Declaration on enhancing cooperation in fighting antisemitism and encouraging reporting of antisemitic incidents'. This group of frontrunners aims to further step up the fight against antisemitism at EU level and will focus on improving the registration of antisemitic incidents and other urgent issues.

Speakers in the session highlighted the importance of registering all antisemitic incidents while differentiating between criminal incidents and legal but harmful incidents that give an impression of the overall atmosphere in society. The basis for registering incidents should be the IHRA definition.

Under-reporting and lack of harmonisation were identified as two common problems. It was emphasised that comparable data is important for national strategies and the EU Strategy. Furthermore, several myths that are holding back efforts on combating antisemitism were highlighted, namely that current reporting offers up a true picture. That great disparities between countries are observed undercuts this view, and moreover, levels of reporting fall far short of actual incident levels. Another myth is that GDPR prevents data collection in this area. It was also noted that police figures on antisemitic activity and the manifestations published by civil society organisations can be completely different.