



## COMBATING ANTISEMITISM FOSTERING JEWISH life



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

### SPEECH: VICE-PRESIDENT MARGARITIS SCHINAS

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

It is a pleasure to join you again for this fifth meeting of our Working Group on combating antisemitism. It comes at a very important moment, **as we start to sketch the main lines of the first-ever EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life**. And that is why, more so than in our past meetings, I **am here today mainly to listen to you**.

Over the next weeks and months we will be consulting broadly on this landmark initiative, but I wanted to start right here. **This group**, bringing together Member State special envoys, experts as well as representatives of Jewish communities and organisations from across the EU, **has a critical role to play in ensuring that we get it right**. That we put together a strategy which addresses the real issues affecting Jews in Europe and is able to meaningfully amplify the significant efforts already undertaken by Member States to tackle this scourge.



**Antisemitism is unfortunately on the rise across the European Union**, having led to lethal attacks and being expressed more openly and more explicitly, in particular online.

**During the pandemic, Jews have been baselessly blamed** for creating and spreading the virus on purpose. We have seen people trivialising the Holocaust, by comparing democratically established public health measures to save lives and protect our societies against the virus, to the dehumanising treatment and extermination of millions under the Nazi regime.

In the previous session on online antisemitism, you discussed the results of the new study showing a seven-fold increase in antisemitic postings from French-language accounts, while over a thirteen-fold increase in antisemitic comments took place within German channels. Even in the context of the broader “infodemic” that ensued after the coronavirus outbreak, **these figures are shocking – and a clear call to action.**

More recently, **linked to the situation in Israel and Gaza, we saw Jewish Europeans targeted in a series of highly alarming incidents:** synagogues and community premises being spray-painted and slurs of “death to the Jews” heard in European streets, including very recently here in Brussels.

I have been clear for the first moment: these incidents cross the line. **They are clear expressions of antisemitism**, putting Jewish communities and our societies as a whole at grave risk.

Antisemitic crimes and hate speech must be unequivocally condemned and brought to justice.



### ***[Examples of recent Commission actions]***

Since our last meeting in December, from the side of the Commission we **have taken several steps to further strengthen Europe's response.**

Together with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance we published a **Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA definition** on antisemitism. The handbook provides an overview of good practices from across Europe on the use of the IHRA definition by international organisations, national administrations, civil society and Jewish communities.

We encourage you to make use of it for training purposes – including in the education and law enforcement context – and to provide us with further feedback and suggestions.

The Commission has also recently launched **a number of infringement procedures** to ensure the proper implementation of the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia, including the rules on Holocaust denial and trivialisation. Our services are always ready to work together with Member State authorities to facilitate the correct transposition and implementation of the Framework Decision and we are pleased to see progress in law making following the letters of formal notice.

To combat antisemitism and hate speech more broadly, our new proposed **Digital Services Act** makes it clear, through legally binding provisions, that online platforms – especially powerful tech giants – must take greater responsibility for preventing the dissemination and promotion of antisemitic content.

The security of Jewish communities remains of course a top priority for us. Through the **Internal Security Fund** we will be supporting two projects for the **protection of places of worship**, which involve Jewish communities and the protection of synagogues.



And together with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the World Jewish Congress, the Commission is currently organising **a series of events to improve communication between national authorities responsible for security and Jewish communities**. The first event will take place next Monday, 7 June, together with the Croatian authorities.

***[EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life]***

Building on initiatives like these, we have started to design the **first-ever EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life**, to be presented this autumn.

As I told you at our very first meeting, a few days after taking up this office, for me **“the fight for normality of Jewish life is a litmus test for Europe to defend and protect its diversity” – the European way of life**, in other words.

Jewish people must feel safe when they visit a restaurant, or go to the synagogue. Jewish people must be able to go online, without being faced with an avalanche of antisemitic comments and threats. Football matches should be free from antisemitic chants. Pupils and students need to know about the Holocaust as a defining moment in our history. And there are **many more things that need to be done so that Jewish people can live their lives free from antisemitism**.

For this reason, with the new strategy we will pursue **three key objectives**:

1. **Combat and prevent all forms of antisemitism**
2. **Protect and foster Jewish life**
3. **Support education, research and promote Holocaust remembrance.**

The strategy will also seek to **mainstream** the fight against antisemitism across all policy areas and relevant union funding programmes, and link our efforts within the EU to the **international dimension** of combating antisemitism.



The EU strategy will provide a framework to **support and complement Member States efforts.**

To date, **15 Member States** have or are in the process of adopting self-standing **strategies on antisemitism**, or are introducing specific measures on antisemitism in their general strategies on racism.

**18 Member States have adopted** or endorsed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance **working-definition** of antisemitism.

This is **very good progress** and I want to take the opportunity to thank you sincerely for it. **But of course a lot still remains to be done.** In the 2018 and 2020 Council Declarations all Member States were called to adopt holistic strategies to prevent and fight all forms of antisemitism, as part of their strategies on preventing racism, xenophobia, radicalisation and violent extremism – and to endorse the IHRA definition.

It is my hope, that our joint work on the EU strategy will also help accelerate these efforts at national level.

I also welcome Sweden's initiative to discuss Holocaust Remembrance and combating antisemitism at the **high-level Malmö International Forum** in October.

We will be working on our strategy with an eye to the Malmö Forum and would also encourage all our Member States to come up with ambitious national pledges.



Dear friends,

I will stop here with these introductory thoughts and I **very much look forward to hearing from you**. To listen to your ideas about the key issues that the forthcoming EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life should address. And most importantly, to your suggestions on possible concrete actions we can take at the European level to address them and to complement Member States' efforts.

As I already mentioned, this debate is part of a consultation process that will accompany us during the preparation of the strategy. The roadmap of the strategy will be published soon on the Commission's 'Have Your Say' website and **you are warmly invited to provide also written feedback**.

**We cannot develop the strategy without you, and we cannot fight antisemitism without you. This is a fight Europe is determined to win.**