



COMBATING ANTISEMITISM FOSTERING JEWISH life



2ND MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU STRATEGY ON COMBATING ANTISEMITISM AND FOSTERING JEWISH LIFE

SPEECH: VICE-PRESIDENT MARGARITIS SCHINAS

VIDEO MESSAGE

Dear friends,

It is a pleasure to welcome you for the first time in over two years to an in-person meeting of the Working Group on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life. Unexpected travel obligations unfortunately made it impossible for me to be able to join you in Brussels, but I do sincerely hope this is the last time I address you via a screen.

Since the last working group meeting in December we have been reminded in the harshest way possible that peace in Europe cannot be taken for granted. A crude awakening that authoritarianism still poses a threat to the security and sovereignty of democratic states, to our democratic societies, to our way of life.

The toll of this unprovoked and senseless invasion on human lives and livelihoods is already tragic. Millions of Ukrainians have fled to the EU and many more are internally displaced across Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Jewish community has been hard hit. I am aware and would like to acknowledge and applaud the efforts of Jewish organisations and communities to help Jewish and non-Jewish refugees.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine also has serious implications for the fight against antisemitism and for Jewish communities worldwide.

Russia has falsely claimed that it seeks to "denazify" Ukraine, and that the Ukrainian government is committing a genocide in Russian-speaking regions. This blatant misuse of terminology by Russia fuels hatred and antisemitism and has a corrosive effect on the collective historical memory and on the resilience and cohesion of our democratic societies.

We cannot allow anyone to re-write history. Protecting the facts is our duty. After the spike in antisemitic conspiracy myths during the pandemic, we now see the emergence of new forms of antisemitism linked to the war.



I cannot stress enough the importance of your discussions today. It is vital that we find ways to effectively combat these false narratives and that we keep adjusting our response to fight antisemitism in all its forms – old and new.

In response to our EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, Member States have committed in the Council to develop their national strategies against antisemitism by the end of this year. This is a major step.

I am happy to see that today you will present and listen to updates from Member States on where each stand in the development of these strategies. I assure you that the Commission – our Coordinator and her team – are and will continue to be there to support you every step of the way.

There are two aspects that I find particularly important to be addressed effectively in these national strategies – and which will be the focus of your discussions tomorrow. Namely, the security of Jewish communities and improving the recording of antisemitic incidents.

Right here, in the European Union, we have witnessed terrorist attacks on Jewish schools, synagogues and museums over the last ten years. Children, women and men have lost their lives in these attacks.

38% of Jewish people in the EU have considered emigrating because they do not feel safe in the EU.

This is unacceptable.

Let me be clear: people are of course free to emigrate to other places outside the EU if they so wish. But this should never – ever – be out of fear. It cannot be because they do not feel safe here.

We need to discuss what the future security of the Jewish communities in the EU could and should look like, prioritise it in national strategies and back it with appropriate funding.

To fight antisemitism effectively we also need to have robust data about all antisemitic incidents, and the starting point for recording all incidents should be the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism.

I welcome the results of the European conference on antisemitism, hosted by Austria in May, during which several Member States signed a Declaration on enhancing cooperation in fighting antisemitism and encouraging reporting of antisemitic incidents. This is the spirit and commitment we need to step-up the protection of Jewish communities.

Dear friends,

Let me close by stating that we now find ourselves at a critical juncture.

Despite our best efforts to foster Jewish life, antisemitism remains on the rise. We need to step up our efforts and find ways to make our endeavours more effective.

By the end of this decade, as set out in our Strategy, Jewish communities should not only feel but be safer in Europe, both online and offline.

Our strategies have to make a difference, and your discussions will be important to find the most effective ways to do so. The hopes and aspirations of Jewish communities all across our Union rely on this.

I wish you a fruitful and productive working group today and tomorrow, and very much look forward to hearing about its outcomes.