



JOINT STATEMENT

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 13TH EU – ISRAEL HIGH LEVEL SEMINAR ON COMBATING RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND ANTISEMITISM

10 November 2020

The European Union and the State of Israel are committed to further strengthen their collaboration in protecting Jewish communities and institutions as well as the Jewish cultural heritage around the world, including in multinational organisations.

On 10 November, the European Union and the State of Israel held their 13th High Level Seminar on combating racism, xenophobia and antisemitism online, via videoconference. The EU-Israel seminar is a unique annual forum that brings together European and Israeli civil servants, policymakers, experts, international organisations and non-governmental organisations to discuss best practices and measures to combat racism, xenophobia and antisemitism. The discussion of today focused on hate speech in the digital sphere and its impact to the real world, as well as possible measures to address the challenges of online hatred.

The Political Director of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Alon Bar, indicated in his introductory remarks: *“The digital sphere opens the unlimited opportunity to proliferate hate ideology of all kinds. Research shows that the internet has become the main outlet for circulation all types of Antisemitism. The sad reality has proven that a straight line connects the virtual and the physical world. Governments have the responsibility and the means to face this challenge, using the IHRA definition as a tool to identify and mark the problem. Coalition building between governments, civil society and the technology companies is an important tool.”*

Paul Nemitz, Principle Advisor Justice and Consumers (EU Commission) stated: *“To ensure safety of its users, the digital highway needs rules. The spike of antisemitic and racist hate speech in the course of the COVID pandemic has increased the urgency. With its upcoming proposal for a Digital Services Act, the European Commission aims for a harmonised, clear set of due-diligence obligations for online platforms, redress mechanisms, accountability measures, and cooperation obligations with public authorities. The Act will also ensure greater transparency on how platforms moderate content, on advertising and on algorithmic processes.”*

Katharina von Schnurbein, European Commission Coordinator on Combatting antisemitism and fostering Jewish life added: *“The Commission stands firmly against all forms of antisemitism. The road from conspiracy myths to hate crime is short as we have seen at the terrorist attacks in Halle, Paris, Copenhagen and elsewhere. Public incitement to violence or hatred as well as Holocaust denial is criminalized across the EU online and offline. We urge social platforms not to become platforms of hate and remove illegal content.”*



Noam Katz Senior DDG Media and Public Affairs Division (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs) remarked on *“the importance of the partnership between states, civil society and technology companies in addressing this challenge. The digital sphere created a new equation that forces a change of concept. This phenomenon is much too big for a state or even a bigger entity like the EU. Partnerships are a must in order to face the challenge. We need to encourage states, organizations and the technology companies to adopt the IHRA definition. Israel and the European Commission will continue to work closely in the dialogue with the Tech companies in order for them to implement the much needed tools to handle the massive amount of data in this context.”*

The participants discussed the worrying rise of antisemitism online in times of Coronavirus. In two working sessions, the forum analyzed the landscape and spread of antisemitism online, its roots, networks and implications for Jewish life globally. The European Commission and the State of Israel stressed their will to intensify their collaboration in the fight against antisemitism, racism and xenophobia online and proposed viable counter measures such as the use of the non-legally binding definitions on antisemitism as well as Holocaust denial and distortion by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) as a reference for identifying antisemitic hate speech and conspiracy ideologies. Together the EU and Israel will work towards exploring the legal measures available as well as expanding the dialogue with the Tech companies in order to reach a better implementation of algorithmic tools in tracing and removing illegal antisemitic content from their platforms.

Background:

The seminar took place against the backdrop of the 2018 “Council declaration on the fight against antisemitism and the development of a common security approach to better protect Jewish communities and institutions in Europe”ⁱ, which invites EU Member States to adopt and implement “a holistic strategy to prevent and fight all forms of antisemitism as part of their strategies on preventing racism, xenophobia, radicalization and violent extremism”. 14 EU Member States are in the process of adopting or have adopted national strategies or have integration specific action against antisemitism into their overall strategies against racism and violent extremism. The non-legally binding IHRA working definition of antisemitism has been adopted by 18 EU Member States.

To complement national actions, the European Commission will table a comprehensive EU strategy on antisemitism in 2021.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/12/06/fight-against-antisemitism-council-declaration/>

ⁱⁱ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2021-commission-work-programme-key-documents_en