



COMBATING ANTISEMITISM FOSTERING JEWISH life



1st MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU STRATEGY ON COMBATING ANTISEMITISM AND FOSTERING JEWISH LIFE

Speech: Vice-President Margaritis Schinas

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

It is a pleasure and an honour to address you today, no longer as the ad hoc working group on combating antisemitism, but as the first Working Group on the implementation of the EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life.

I would like to start by thank you sincerely for the instrumental role this group has played, through your expertise and proactive contribution to shaping this strategy, which has been warmly and unanimously welcomed - not only by EU leaders in the recent European Council conclusions, but also internationally.

At the Malmö international Forum on combating antisemitism and Holocaust Remembrance in October the Strategy served as the EU pledge, drawing praise and appreciation from the side of major Jewish organisations, the President of Israel and many others. I would like to sincerely thank Sweden once again for hosting this major event.

This strategy is as historic, as it is unfortunately necessary. I do not have to remind this group that antisemitism is tragically again on the rise, exacerbated by the context of the pandemic.

We see it on the internet every day. We see it in too many of the anti-vax demonstrations, and we have seen it in every lethal attacks against the Jewish community and individuals.

The Commission had to respond. Member States have to respond.



[NATIONAL STRATEGIES]

In the two Council declarations on combating antisemitism of December 2018 and December 2020, Member States committed to adopting strategies against antisemitism or to take dedicated measures in strategies against racism. Time is running. In the framework of the EU strategy we look forward to seeing all member states adopt these strategies by the end of 2022, so four years after adoption of the first Council declaration

We encourage you to develop stand-alone strategies addressing antisemitism, or to take dedicated measures within the national strategies against racism, which the Commission, in line with the EU anti-racism action plan, also encourages Member States to adopt by the end of 2022.

The Commission will evaluate the national strategies against antisemitism in 2023. The office of our antisemitism Coordinator is always ready to support you, starting today with this meeting which is dedicated – precisely – to the development of national strategies.

[EU STRATEGY]

The aim of today's and tomorrow's working group meetings is to use the EU strategy as a starting point and inspiration for the development of national strategies in your country.

Our aim was to put forward a holistic approach that tackles antisemitism in all areas it occurs. To that end, the strategy is founded on three pillars:

1. Preventing and combating all forms of antisemitism
2. Protecting and fostering Jewish life in the EU
3. Education, research and Holocaust remembrance.

These pillars guide our work inside the EU, but also outside, in our external action.

We encourage you to develop your national strategies around a similar structure covering areas ranging from protection and online antisemitism to education and Holocaust remembrance. You can include an external component, or mainstream the fight against antisemitism in your international human rights strategies.

The EU strategy includes over 70 actions. These are not only actions that the Commission will take, but also actions that the Commission encourages the Member States to take in their national strategies.

I will not mention all of them now, but allow me to highlight a number of pressing issues that have to form part of every national strategy, while later today, Katharina von Schnurbein, will run you through the actions in greater detail.



[PILLAR 1: PREVENTING AND COMBATING ALL FORMS OF ANTISEMITISM]

The first pillar of the strategy focusses on preventing and combating all forms of antisemitism. To do so, there are **three key prerequisites**:

- First, adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition, to recognise antisemitism in all its forms. So far, although all Member States have adopted the IHRA definition in the framework of IHRA, only 20 Member States have adopted the IHRA definition in their national context. I encourage all of you to do so.
- Second, appointing a national coordinator. This is important for the successful development and implementation of a national strategy, and for mainstreaming the fight against antisemitism in all relevant policy areas.
- Third, to have an impact, the strategies need to be supported with the appropriate funding, both at EU level (and we will come to that) but also from national budgets.

There are also **three specific policy priorities** under this pillar that I would like to highlight:

- First, we need to address the underreporting by Jewish victims of hate speech and hate crime, and focus on improving our methodologies to record and collect data, so that we can get a clear picture of the problem we are facing. We all know that what we see is only the tip of the iceberg; unfortunately, the problem of antisemitism is far wider.
- Second, we need to address antisemitism online. We have made great steps forward over the last years in tackling hate speech and disinformation online, but more needs to be done. National strategies should especially address antisemitic hate speech and disinformation in all the 23 languages of the European Union, as many of the current efforts focus on English only.
- Finally, to successfully combat online hate, we also need to step up on active enforcement. This is really an important point that we would like to see reflected in the national strategies. People need to be fully aware of the consequences of their actions online, and know that hate speech and hate crime will not go unpunished.

On the Commission's side, we have taken a major step in this direction last week, by proposing to extend the list of 'EU crimes' to hate speech and hate crime - including of course antisemitic hate speech and hate crime.



[PILLAR 2 – PROTECTING AND FOSTERING JEWISH LIFE]

Pillar 2 of the strategy is dedicated to protecting and fostering Jewish life. It is a disgrace that three generations after the Holocaust, the Jewish communities in the EU still have reasons to fear about their security.

But, as long as protection is necessary, it should be the State providing it. It is not acceptable that Jewish communities need to shoulder disproportionately the cost of their own security, as many currently do. National strategies are an opportunity for Member States to address this issue and strengthen the security commitment towards Jewish communities.

And from the EU side we will be launching soon in the new year a call for proposals for the protection of public spaces and places of worship, to complement these efforts.

Jewish life should not only be protected, it should be also allowed to flourish. Despite the long-standing presence of Jews in Europe, people have remarkably little knowledge of Jewish history and contemporary Jewish life in their countries. We need to raise awareness on Jewish life and safeguard Jewish heritage, so that EU citizens are familiar with and proud of their diverse societies, including their local Jewish communities.

And we need to ensure that Jews are free – as any minority – to live their lives in accordance with their religious and cultural traditions. In this respect it will be in particular important to find the right balance between animal welfare and freedom of religion. The Commission will host a conference next year to facilitate a dialogue between the Jewish and Muslim communities and national authorities.

[PILLAR 3 – EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE]

The third pillar focusses on education, research and Holocaust remembrance. Remembering, researching and educating about the past is crucial to preventing catastrophes from happening again. Like we teach the importance of the French Revolution as a key moment in the history of the European continent, every child in Europe should learn the universal lessons of the Holocaust as a defining moment for creating the European Union.

However, this is not enough. We should go beyond the Holocaust and also focus our educational efforts and research on contemporary Jewish life and antisemitism. We encourage Member States – through their national strategies – to promote the knowledge of Jewish life, antisemitism and the Shoah through education and research, and we support the Jewish communities to exchange on their culture and traditions with other local communities.

Over the next months, we will be reaching out to local authorities and Jewish communities to help us develop, together, a network of places “where the Holocaust happened”, allowing citizens to retrace Jewish presence in Europe over the centuries and preserve the memory of the Shoah, also locally.



[LEADING THE GLOBAL FIGHT]

Finally, we have the ambition to lead the global fight against antisemitism. The EU will use all available tools to call on partner countries to actively combat antisemitism, taking into account the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

Member States are encouraged to closely cooperate at EU level to jointly address antisemitism through international organisations. This can be done by incorporating the fight against antisemitism into all their human rights strategies and policies, and make this a component in their national strategies against antisemitism.

[CONCLUSION]

To conclude, we hope that this historic EU strategy can be an inspiration for decisive action also at national level.

The Commission has significantly stepped up our funding for fundamental rights in general (1,55 billion under the Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values Programme until 2027) and will systematically include antisemitism, fostering Jewish life and Holocaust remembrance in relevant EU programmes.

In the same vein, we have invited the Council to support the implementation of the strategy and we will publish comprehensive implementation reports in 2024 and 2029. These will be based on the input from Member States, also with regard to the implementation of their national strategies and policies.

I am encouraged that President Macron and the incoming French Presidency have signalled their intention to keep this matter high on the EU agenda over the next months

Fighting antisemitism is not something the Commission, or any of us, can do alone. We really need to do it together, EU institutions, Member States, Jewish communities and all other stakeholders. Fighting antisemitism is a responsibility for all of us.

I wish you a successful and productive working group today and tomorrow, and look forward to cooperating with you in the coming years to implement the EU strategy and your national strategies.