



Working Group on Antisemitism

4TH MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL DECLARATION ON THE FIGHT AGAINST ANTISEMITISM

SPEECH: VICE-PRESIDENT VĚRA JOUROVÁ

Excellencies,

Representatives of Member States and of the Jewish communities,

I hope you enjoyed fruitful discussions today on how to develop holistic strategies to combat antisemitism, also by using the IHRA definition and addressing antisemitic prejudices through civic courses.

As Vice-President, I am responsible for leading the Commission's work on values and transparency. Countering disinformation, upholding fundamental rights and the rule of law, and promoting democracy are values and principles crucial to our democratic societies and to the functioning of the European Union. Unfortunately, we live in difficult times where we need to stress constantly the importance of these values.

It can be useful to look back at our history to see what lessons we need to draw from to combat modern challenges. I would like to quote Hannah Arendt, who 70 years ago, reflecting on totalitarianism, taught us:

“In an ever-changing, incomprehensible world the masses had reached the point where they would, at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and that nothing was true. ... Mass propaganda discovered that its audience was ready at all times to believe the worst, no matter how absurd, and did not particularly object to being deceived because it held every statement to be a lie anyhow.”

In the past, we had state-made propaganda, now we have disinformation, conspiracy myths and hate speech online. They can come from state actors, but also from individuals who are abusing social media and the internet to reach an audience they could never reach before.

As part of these developments, we see since the turn of the century a new rise in antisemitic hate speech and conspiracy myths which has been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. As absurd as these myths might seem, they create real threats when they lead to antisemitic hate crimes and terrorist attacks. Consequently, Jewish people may no longer express their Jewishness, participate in democratic debates, and above all they may not feel safe in the EU.

In September, I presented the 2020 rule of law report. The rule of law mechanism is one element of a broader endeavour at EU level to strengthen the values of democracy, equality, and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities.

And last week, I unveiled the European Democracy Action Plan. The first time we have a broad and a coherent approach to challenges to democracy focusing on election integrity, strengthening the media environment and fighting disinformation and interference. The forthcoming Digital Services Act will in addition clarify obligations to the platforms regarding illegal content, including hate speech.

And finally, the new strategy to strengthen the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights to help ensure that it is applied to its full potential.

All these efforts will feed and support the effectiveness of the 2021 European strategy to combat antisemitism. When Jewish people face antisemitism and do not feel safe in the EU, we are failing not only them, but also our democratic ideals.

The Commission stands shoulder to shoulder with the Jewish communities to fight antisemitism in all its forms.