



COMBATING ANTISEMITISM FOSTERING JEWISH life



5TH MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL DECLARATION ON THE FIGHT AGAINST ANTISEMITISM

VIA VIDEO-CONFERENCE
3 - 4 JUNE 2021

BACKGROUND

Introduction

In her statement, at the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2021, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said: “Because antisemitism strikes at the heart of our values: humanity, religious freedom, equality. Antisemitism is a poison for our society. It is up to all of us to fight it. To prevent it. And to eradicate it.”

To follow-up on this, the Commission announced in its [Work Programme 2021](#) that it will present, by the end of 2021, a comprehensive Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, to complement and support Member States’ efforts “given the rise of antisemitic violence and hate crime”. On 2 December 2020, the Council adopted a [Declaration on mainstreaming the fight against antisemitism across policy areas](#), in which it explicitly invites the Commission “to advance the fight against antisemitism (...) by bringing supporting measures together in a comprehensive European strategy on combating antisemitism.”

The aim of the Strategy is threefold: I) to prevent and combat all forms of antisemitism (online and offline), II) to foster Jewish life and safeguard Jewish heritage and III) to ensure and strengthen Holocaust remembrance, education and research. These objectives form the pillars that will guide the development of the Strategy.

The European Commission has recently launched the Europe-wide consultation process for the Conference on the Future of Europe. The overarching aim of the EU Strategy is to ensure a future for Jews in Europe and this Working Group meeting will thus be part of the participatory efforts to listen to citizens and Member States representatives.

At the beginning of June, the Commission will launch a specific consultation process for the EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life on its website. This meeting of the Working Group is the main event to consult Member States and Jewish communities on the development of the forthcoming Strategy.



Session I. Preventing and combating all forms of antisemitism

According to the [2018 FRA survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU](#), nine in 10 (89 %) Jews consider that antisemitism has increased in their country, with more than eight in 10 (85 %) considering it to be a serious problem. In this session, two separate panel discussions on combating online and offline antisemitism take place. Conspiracy theories, disinformation and hate speech online have proliferated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first panel starts with the launch of the study “The virus of antisemitism. A mapping of French and German online antisemitism during the Covid-19 pandemic”, procured by the Commission to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, which examined the rise of online antisemitism in French and German during the pandemic. This is followed by a discussion exploring the most urgent actions needed to work towards an online space free from antisemitism. In the second panel panellists discuss (offline) antisemitism in the daily lives of Jewish people. 40% of Jewish people in the EU worry about being physically attacked, and 38% say they have considered emigrating because of not feeling safe as a Jew in the EU (FRA, 2018). The focus is on what can and needs to be done to better protect Jewish communities, and decrease the number of hate crimes committed against Jewish people and their properties, against the backdrop of hate speech online having led to antisemitic hate crime.

Session II: Fostering Jewish life and safeguarding Jewish heritage

Combating antisemitism alone is not enough to ensure Europe is a safe and inclusive place for Jewish communities. Currently, only 3% of Europeans feel ‘very well informed’ about Jewish history, customs and practices, and 68% say they are ‘not informed’ at all. Awareness about Jewish life and culture, which has been an integral part of Europe’s history for centuries, can help addressing conspiracy myths and antisemitic (unconscious) biases. Jewish heritage provides evidence of this history, but is often in poor condition. This session explores how Jewish life in its diversity can be supported by the EU and in Member States, which concrete European actions should be taken to ensure a future for vibrant Jewish life in Europe, and what can be don’t to safeguard Jewish heritage.

Session III: Holocaust remembrance, education and research

The Shoah is a defining legacy of European history. Keeping its memory through commemorations, education, research and international cooperation is essential for the European Union in its goal to prevent antisemitism and to build a Union of Equality. More than half of Europeans (53%) perceive Holocaust denial as being a problem in their country, and 58% of Europeans are unaware of legislation criminalising Holocaust denial in their country. It is instrumental to preserve historical memory, encourage research and in particular, the memory of the Holocaust through free and open discussion about the role of heroes, collaborators, and bystanders – individuals or groups. This session explores how to educate, commemorate and research the Holocaust in a time when the last survivors are passing away and will no longer be able to share their stories, and which structures are needed to reach the next generation in a digital age.