



## COMBATING ANTISEMITISM FOSTERING JEWISH life



### 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Working Group on combating antisemitism 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> June 2021, via videoconference

## REPORT

The 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Working Group on the implementation of the Council Declaration on the fight against antisemitism took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2021, via videoconference. The main aim of the meeting was to gather contributions from participants for the development of the upcoming **EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life**. 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.”

### DAY 1 - THURSDAY, 3 JUNE 2021

**Katharina von Schnurbein**, European Commission Coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, welcomed the participants and gave a short introductory presentation on the two-day event as well as the expected contributions from those present to the development of the upcoming Strategy. She presented the work of the Commission on combating antisemitism and the current challenges that contributed to the decision to step up the fight against this scourge and put forward a strategy specifically on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life in October 2021. Furthermore, she presented **the objectives of the strategy, which are 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 inside and outside the EU. Each session focused on one of these pillars.

#### Session I. Preventing and combating all forms of antisemitism

The session started with a poll on ‘**What are your expectations from the EU Strategy on combating antisemitism?**’ to which participants indicated as first three priorities **1)** addressing online hatred; **2)** increasing awareness about and fostering Jewish life; and **3)** support appointment of national coordinator and adoption of national strategies.

**Wester Meijdam**, Policy officer in the office of the European Commission Coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, introduced the panel discussion by explaining that online antisemitism has real-life consequences, as it can lead to radicalisation and violent attacks on the Jewish community. He presented the main policies and instruments that the Commission has put forward



already to address antisemitism, hate speech, hate crimes, and terrorist attacks and hateful content online, such as the Framework Decision on combating Racism and Xenophobia, the proposal for a Digital Services Act, the Security Union and Counter-Terrorism Agenda, Victims' Rights Directive and Strategy and the Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online.

The first session comprised of two separate panel discussions on combating online and offline antisemitism. Panellists and participants discussed the new challenges faced by the spread of online hate, the real consequences and links to the physical world and how best to tackle and address all forms of antisemitism in order to ensure a safe Europe for all citizens, in all spheres of life.

At the occasion, the Commission released the study "[The rise of antisemitism online during the pandemic. A study of French and German content](#)", that showed a seven-fold increase in antisemitic content on French language accounts, and over a thirteen-fold increase in antisemitic content on German language accounts comparing January-February 2020 to the same period in 2021. Participants agreed that urgent action needs to be taken and that more cooperation with internet platforms is required in order to stop the proliferation of disinformation and conspiracy theories that endangers the lives of Jews in Europe. The study was conducted by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and presented by **Milo Comerford**, Senior Policy Manager at ISD.

The **panel on online antisemitism** opened with the polling question '**What are the most urgent actions that need to be taken to address online antisemitism?**' to which responders indicated as the highest on the list: **1)** more cooperation with internet platforms; **2)** tackling conspiracy myths and disinformation; and **3)** use artificial intelligence to monitor and remove antisemitic content.

The panellists presented the key challenges they saw and gave recommendations on how to address them, including the need to: mainstream the use of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism; develop counter-narratives online; address the gap whereby mostly online companies are those who define what speech is removed and what not, and ensure clear definitions; look into the business models of online companies; improve data collection; work on media literacy; and improve international cooperation to address antisemitism online.

Before hearing from **panelists on offline antisemitism**, participants indicated that '**the most urgent actions needed to better protect Jewish people, their property and their institutions**' are **1)** to train law enforcement and the judiciary; **2)** improve data collection and recording; and **3)** strengthen the links between Jewish communities and security authorities.

These actions were highlighted as well by the speakers during the discussion. They emphasized the need to increase security funding and ensure that the data collected across the EU is reliable and comparable, based on trust built between Jewish communities and law enforcement agencies. Moreover, it was proposed to set an observatory for monitoring the implementation by Member States of the policies and tools agreed in the Council Declarations and to ensure they are committed to protecting their Jewish communities. In addition, the need to educate people about Jewish life in its full diversity was highlighted, so that people are not only educated about the Holocaust and antisemitism. Other actions proposed included: conduct studies to better understand antisemitism in today's society; ensure support for victims of antisemitism and enhance interfaith and intercultural dialogue (coalition building).

**Vice-President Schinas stated in his [keynote speech](#)** that there has been a rise in antisemitism online during the pandemic and reiterated that targeting Jewish Europeans in response to the situation



in Israel and Gaza is antisemitic and that antisemitic crimes and hate speech must be unequivocally condemned and brought to justice. He described the strategy as a litmus test for Europe to protect the European way of life. Jewish people must feel safe. In reference to the significant increase of antisemitic content online he said the findings of the above mentioned study were shocking and a call to action. The strategy is being developed with an eye to the *Malmö International Forum for Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism*. He encouraged all Member States to come up with ambitious national pledges as suggested by the Swedish host, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven. The keynote speech was followed by a discussion with participants who shared their insights and recommendations for the EU Strategy.

Member States and Jewish communities' representatives, Jewish umbrella organisations, International and European agencies and NGOs indicated that among the **priorities**, the strategy should envisage: take into consideration the external dimension; build a platform for cooperation on sharing data on antisemitism; work with online platforms to deal with antisemitism, Holocaust denial and distortion; ensure funding for Jewish heritage; address freedom of religion and believe and Jewish cultural practices and traditions, such as related to the CJEU ruling on ritual slaughter; ensure zero tolerance to antisemitism. Participants had the opportunity to further share their thoughts on what issues the strategy should address and what concrete actions should be included during **break-out sessions**. The main ideas that were discussed during these sessions included the following **recommendations** for the Strategy: include Jewish history into curricula and raise awareness about Jewish life and contribution to Europe; increase funding for the security of Jewish communities; conduct study to understand the online/offline dynamics of antisemitism; develop a common European remembrance culture; improve structures for the reporting and recording of antisemitic incidents.

## DAY 2 - FRIDAY, 4 JUNE 2021

**Keynote speaker Anna Ekström**, *Minister of Education and Research of Sweden*, informed that the *International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and combating antisemitism* will take place in Malmö on 13–14 October 2021. Many leading EU and international representatives have confirmed their attendance. She highlighted that all delegations are asked to make ambitious pledges at the Malmö Forum, take concrete initiatives and initiate reforms to combat antisemitism and ensure Holocaust remembrance. She added that Sweden is preparing for the establishment of a museum to preserve/perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust. Minister Ekström emphasised the need to address online and offline hatred and to focus on education and raising awareness about antisemitism and Holocaust, so that a safe European society can be ensured for all Jews.

### Session II: Fostering Jewish life and safeguarding Jewish heritage

The second session explored how the EU could support and foster a vibrant Jewish life in all its diversity in Europe and safeguard Jewish heritage. When asked in a polling question '**What needs to be done to ensure a future for Jewish life?**' participants indicated **1)** raising awareness of contemporary Jewish life, followed by **2)** improve security and then **3)** ensure freedom of religion and belief.

Panelists as well as participants shared best practices, gave their insights on what the current perception of Jews and Jewish life are, and proposed several recommendations for concrete actions or approaches



for the Strategy: encouraging cooperation between different sectors, including or especially at the local level; adopt an integrated, pluralistic and participatory approach to fostering Jewish life; raise awareness and teach about prolific Jewish life, with Holocaust as last chapter; develop teaching recommendations; highlight Jewish celebration dates; focus on coalition building between different cultures and communities; improve database on Jewish heritage. The main aim expressed by all was to achieve a situation where Jewish life is a normal part of European culture.

### Session III: Holocaust remembrance, education and research

**Pascale Falek**, *Policy Officer in the office of the European Commission Coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life*, introduced this session emphasizing that remembering the Shoah remains essential, keeping its memory alive is key for the EU to prevent racism and antisemitism. According to a study, one out of 20 Europeans has never heard of the Holocaust. Only 42% of Europeans are aware of legislation criminalising Holocaust denial. **Karel Berkhoff**, *Co-Director of the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI)*, presented the work of EU-funded EHRI which aims to overcome the fragmentation of Holocaust resources and accelerate the digital transformation of Holocaust research. Member States are invited to support the building of the new EHRI structure.

The following **‘actions to ensure Holocaust remembrance in the digital age, with the last survivors passing away’** were indicated by participants following a poll: **1)** strengthen enforcement of legislation on Holocaust denial, distortion and trivialization; **2)** support Holocaust education and remembrance in external actions; and **3)** more visits to commemoration sites.

Panelists and participants came with the following suggestions: teach not only about the Holocaust, but also about Jewish life; offer psychological counselling for teachers to deal with students’ responses to questions related to Shoah; teach universal lessons through education about the Holocaust; support with funding researchers and help with linguistic barriers; make materials about the Shoah accessible (in a digital format and in national languages); set-up standards for Holocaust education. In the **break-out sessions** more ideas to be considered in the development of the Strategy were suggested, such as: take into account the cultural and historical differences between Eastern and Western Europe; celebrate a European wide annual festival of Jewish culture; strengthen the criminalisation of Holocaust denial and trivialisation; prevent the instrumentalisation of the Holocaust for political purposes; create a Jewish cultural heritage month; enhance interest in Jewish life among non-Jewish citizens; set-up an observatory and monitoring by civil society of strategies and measures that are being implemented; and ensure the European Commission leads by example.

**Katharina von Schnurbein** gave the concluding remarks. She said that the Commission aims to deliver an ambitious strategy that supports and complements EU Member States’ efforts, supports Jewish communities and safeguards democracy in its widest sense.