



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 MARGARITIS SCHINAS

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

It is a pleasure to join you today for this virtual meeting of our Working Group on combating antisemitism. It has been six months since we last met, and due to the pandemic they have been challenging months for all of us.

In more ways than one, we had to **reinvent the way we work**. But that certainly did not prevent us as European Union from taking **important steps forward to combat antisemitism**.

[German Presidency]

In fact, over the past few months, the fight against antisemitism has been at the centre of the European political agenda, not least thanks to the **great cooperation with the German Presidency of the Council**.

I would specifically like to thank **Dr Felix Klein**, Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism, for his important role in this cooperation. I am pleased that he is here today to outline the progress we've achieved.

The **Presidency conference of 10 September** highlighted the need for increased coordination. The fight against antisemitism is a task that cuts across different departments, ministries, government levels and policy areas at both the national and the European level. To succeed, **we must step up action on all fronts.**

This is the message with which **Minister Seehofer and I** reached out to Member State governments with our **joint letter of 9 October**, the anniversary of the dreadful attack at the Halle synagogue. I am grateful that today a key part of your discussions will focus on the follow-up to our **call for swift progress towards adopting national strategies** on combating antisemitism.

I also warmly welcome the **new Council Declaration on mainstreaming the fight against antisemitism across policy areas**, which was adopted unanimously on the 2nd December. As we are faced with a worrying spike in antisemitic incidents in many Member States, this Declaration sends a clear message on the steadfast determination of the European Union to address them.

[Commission's strategy to combat antisemitism]

From the side of the European Commission, we stand ready to do our part. On 19 October we announced that we will present, by the end of 2021, **the first comprehensive EU strategy on combating antisemitism.**

We will listen attentively to your views. We want to address the main concerns of Jewish communities and see what support we can best provide from the European level **to complement and support Member States' efforts to tackle antisemitism.**

This Working Group will play an important role in the development of the strategy and in its future implementation, and **I count on your proactive and frank input.**

Looking back at millennia-old antisemitic prejudices and at periods in European history when Jewish people were brutally discriminated, expelled from European countries and murdered simply because they were Jewish, **the significance of this first EU strategy to combat antisemitism cannot be overstated.**

The need for it becomes even more apparent and pressing in light of the **alarming rise in antisemitic incidents** across Europe. From Jewish businesses destroyed in the heart of **Paris**, to a Rabbi being attacked in the streets of **Vienna**, to Jewish monuments vandalised in the Greek city of **Larissa** just a few days ago – images of antisemitic hate are chilling.

Our message is clear: Antisemitism has no place in a united Europe. **Europe is proud of its Jewish communities** and **Europe stands by its Jewish communities.**

[Targeting the spike in antisemitism through a holistic approach]

The task ahead of us is of course not easy.

According to the annual overview by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, thousands of officially recorded antisemitic incidents like the ones I mentioned take place each year. And we know that, due to underreporting, **this is only the tip of the iceberg.**

Hate crimes must be prevented and when they occur, they need to be effectively followed-up and prosecuted.

But hate crimes are a symptom of the a much deeper underlying antisemitism. Nowadays, **the internet lays bare how widespread antisemitism actually is.**

A study published in October by the Swedish Defence Research Agency showed that almost **35% of the posts about Jews** on the platforms Twitter, Reddit, Gab and 4chan **contained antisemitic stereotypes** or expressed hostility towards Jews.

We are already **taking steps together with key digital platforms to address antisemitism** in the online environment. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook recently announced a strengthening of their policies to remove Holocaust denial content. And Amazon is investigating reports on its virtual assistant, Alexa, giving antisemitic responses when asked simple questions about Jews – most likely caused by the amount of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories online.

With our upcoming strategy, we **seek to develop a comprehensive approach** that systematically mainstreams the fight against antisemitism – online and offline – in all relevant policy areas.

This includes our Security Union Strategy; the EU Action Plan against Racism; the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion; policies to combat hate speech, conspiracy myths and disinformation online; education; and our external relations.

[Developments in the Member States – IHRA handbook]

As I stressed already, to succeed, we **need the European, national and local levels to work seamlessly together**. The strategy therefore will aim to complement Member States national frameworks and actions against antisemitism.

To date, seven Member States have or are in the process of adopting self-standing **strategies against antisemitism**, while seven others are introducing specific measures on antisemitism in their general strategies against racism.

Eighteen Member States have so far adopted or endorsed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working-definition of antisemitism.

This progress must continue, in line with the commitment taken by Member States in the 2018 Council Declaration, and reaffirmed again last week.

If your country has not yet picked up the pen, we encourage you to do so. The Commission stands ready to help and support.

To support the use of the IHRA definition, the Commission and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance are **developing a handbook**, providing examples of antisemitism that can be used in training and education.

Elements of the handbook will be presented later today and we hope to make it available for use before the end of the year.

Dear friends,

We are under no illusion that we can get rid of a 2000-year-old hatred in one or two years' time. Nevertheless, the new EU strategy on combating antisemitism is **an unequivocal signal that this is a fight Europe is determined to win.**

A signal of our commitment to Jewish communities that they belong in Europe, that we take their concerns seriously, and that we spare no effort to combat antisemitism in all its forms.

Jewish life is and will always be part of our European societies.

Thank you.