

Commissioner Jourovà: Countering the old disease Antisemitism in Europe – ways forward

Speech by Commissioner Jourovà, in charge of Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, at the Jewish Museum of Belgium, in Brussels

Ms Director,

Members of the Jewish community,

Members of the press,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We could not have chosen a better place than the Jewish Museum here in Brussels for celebrating Jewish life, remembering the Shoah. Thank you, Ms. Director, for hosting us.

I am fully aware of the threat Antisemitism poses still today. While remembering the dead, we must also focus on the living.

We may take the presence of the Jewish communities in Europe for granted, as they 'blend in'. But 74 years after the end of the Shoah, we know it is not a given. Your museum shows that the vibrant Jewish life we see in many European cities today comes close to a miracle. On a recent visit to Vienna, I was again struck by just how much the Jewish community formed the nucleus of the political, intellectual and artistic avant-garde in several European countries before the Second World War.

And I am pleased to learn that following the Austrian EU Presidency, the Romanian government will also place the fight against Antisemitism high on the agenda. After all, Romania, together with Poland, Hungary and my own country – Czechia – used to be hubs for Ashkenazi Jews.

The Nazis and their collaborators tried to extinguish Jewish life across Europe, by systematically killing six million members of the community. This is what we commemorate on Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January, the day of liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

It is thus not surprising that for almost all European Jews (95% to be precise), saying "the Holocaust is a myth or is being exaggerated" is seen as antisemitic.

The Eurobarometer which we release today, reveals that of all the antisemitic expressions, denying the Holocaust is seen also by the general public as the most problematic, albeit by a significantly lower number, namely only one in two (53%).

The lower the education level, the lower the awareness. Education is key to not only understanding the Shoah as the abyss of humanity, but also to increasing awareness of Antisemitism and how it is still very much alive in Europe today. We need to be vigilant and recall the words of Primo Levi, the famous author and Holocaust survivor: "Those who deny Auschwitz would be ready to remake it".

The fact that 9 out of 10 Jews in Europe today again perceive a rise in Antisemitism, as recently stated in a Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey, is Europe's shame. And it stands in stark contrast to the perception of the problem among general public where two thirds do *not* perceive an increase of Antisemitism. Generally speaking, awareness is higher in countries with a large Jewish communities (Sweden, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Italy, United Kingdom, Belgium), where many people state that they have Jewish friends (like in Sweden 45%) or where attacks on the Jewish community have taken place that have been reported in the media.

In fact, 4 in 10 Jews (once again!) think about leaving Europe. When Jews have left Europe in the past, it has never been a good sign of the state of Europe. And I am – we are at the European Commission – determined to ensure a future for Jewish people on this continent; for the sake of the Jewish people and for the sake of Europe.

The European Community has translated "Never again" into law, into equality before the law, into non-discrimination, into criminalisation of incitement to hatred and violence and into the right to make life choices according to each of our traditions and beliefs. This is our Europe. This is the Europe I want to defend.

I believe we all feel that the tone is generally becoming more cruel in public discourse. Over the past years we have initiated policies to address incitement to hatred and violence, including antisemitism.

Code of Conduct

Many internet users perceive an increase of hatred in social media. According to the FRA survey, Jews encounter antisemitic hate speech most often online. Hate crime often starts with hate speech. To counter illegal cyberhate, in May 2016 I concluded a Code of Conduct with main IT-Companies (Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Microsoft). In two weeks (4th February), I will present the results of our fourth monitoring exercise, which will show that the Code is working in terms of removal rates and speed of removal. I am also pleased that more and more platforms are joining the Code of Conduct (Instagram, Snapchat, Daily motion).

New rules to remove terrorist content on-line

In September 2018, the Commission also proposed new rules to remove terrorist content from the web within one hour of order by a competent authority. I hope this legislation will be adopted swiftly by Parliament and Council.

Action Plan to protect public spaces

Security is a major issue for the Jewish community and, in fact, only one in two respondents of the FRA survey believe their governments respond adequately to the security needs of the Jewish community. I have said repeatedly that ensuring the security of all its citizens is the primary responsibility of the state and the costs for it must not be borne by individual communities. The Commission presented a dedicated action plan to protect public spaces in October 2017 with a focus on religious premises. Collaboration between Jewish community security and Commission services including the EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator and Europol have also been strengthened to improve the situation.

High Level Group on Racism and Xenophobia

Finally, we created the EU High-Level Group on racism and xenophobia in May 2016, which helps to counter hate crime, including antisemitic hate crime, by developing tools such as: i) improving recording of hate crimes, ii) ensuring support for hate crime victims and iii) hate crime training for law enforcement.

Beyond these measures in the context of our general strategy countering racism and xenophobia, we have taken concrete steps to counter antisemitism and we are continuously taking them further.

Appointment of Coordinator on combatting Antisemitism

Following the Fundamental Rights Colloquium in 2015, First Vice-President **Timmermans** and I appointed a Coordinator on combatting Antisemitism; to be a dedicated contact point for the Jewish communities and to help translate our determination into a meaningful fight against Antisemitism. Over the past years, several EU member states have appointed special envoys and in Germany even several regions (Länder) have done so. This is useful, given that many of the areas that we need to tackle are national or regional responsibilities.

Support to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition

I am convinced that Antisemitism cannot be defeated if it cannot be defined. Therefore, already in January 2017 I endorsed the IHRA working definition as a basis for our work on countering Antisemitism. The definition outlines the wide variety of ways in which antisemitism is expressed today: from traditional racist ideology, to conspiracy theories, left, right and centre, to antisemitism coming from within the Muslim community or hiding behind anti-Zionism. The FRA survey confirms that these examples are congruent with what the vast majority of respondents see as antisemitic.

I am pleased to see that the European Parliament adopted the definition in its Resolution on antisemitism in May 2017 and recommended its adoption to Member States. By now, seven Member States (United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria) have adopted it, as well as many universities, city councils and political parties. The working definition,

though non-legally binding in its nature, is very helpful in public discourse as well as training for media, educators and public authorities, without impeding the legal right to freedom of speech. It can support those at the forefront, like law enforcement agencies and teachers, to discern the potentially antisemitic nature of an incident and thus improve victim support.

All these activities provide us with an excellent basis to continue our work. However, it is no time for complacency and we should plan ahead. I strongly believe that combatting anti-Semitism should remain high on the political agenda.

This past December, Member States unanimously agreed a Council declaration to step up their fight against Antisemitism and to improve the security for Jewish communities across Europe. This is an important step forward.

This declaration must not remain an empty shell. It should rather become our guiding manual and a solid basis for concrete action. In order for change to happen on the ground, we must all work together on European, national and regional level. My hope would be that by joining all our forces, we will see a decrease of Antisemitism among European Jews when FRA next surveys their views, some 5 or 6 years down the road.

Creation of an expert group

In the declaration, I see four key areas that we should tackle together with member states:

- 1) security of Jewish communities and premises,
- 2) education and Holocaust remembrance,
- 3) increasing the awareness of Antisemitism as a problem by making use of the IHRA definition and better data collection of Antisemitic incidents, also beyond hate crime and
- 4) supporting the development of national strategies.

We already have good practices in several member states, and the Commission can – and should – be instrumental in ensuring that that these practices are shared to encourage and inspire more action on the ground.

With the High-level Member States expert group against racism and xenophobia which I mentioned earlier, we already have a platform that brings all countries together. There is an urgent need to step up our action on antisemitism within this group, in view of the recent data available at EU level.

Therefore I want to announce today that I will ask my services to **set up a working group focused on the ‘Implementation of the Declaration on Antisemitism’** as part of this forum. This will provide a mechanism to provide active support to Member States to make concrete progress in this area.

We hope to harness the informal network of national special envoys to help us with this task. I would like to see concrete results from the work of this group by the end of 2020 with a view to adopting national action plans against antisemitism. My intention is to propose this idea at the next meeting of the High-level group on Racism and Xenophobia in March.

IHRA PIP status

As said earlier, learning from the Holocaust and remembering the victims is at the core of the European project. I am pleased that the European Union acquired Permanent International Partnership with International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance this past November. This will allow the European institutions to liaise even closer with one of the most important European organisation on Holocaust remembrance.

The Commission will actively participate, contribute and benefit from this new status with IHRA. To this end we will create within the European Commission a network of colleagues from relevant Commission services in the course of 2019.

Stimulating more projects to tackle antisemitism

I also believe that we need to put our money where our mouth is. So, for 2019 within the Rights, Citizenship and Equality Programme we have made projects a priority that tackle antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred in innovative ways, that foster Jewish life or engage in coalition building with other communities. I encourage you to keep an eye out for this call, which will be launched on 31 January by DG JUSTICE.

Youth report

Finally, I believe we need to understand better how young people perceive Antisemitism. I have heard more than once from Jewish people of my generation 'I will stay, but I tell my children leave'. We have cooperated with the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS) to ensure a solid response rate among people 16-25 years of age to the Fundamental Rights Agency's (FRA) survey. I would like to thank the EUJS for their support and am pleased to let you know that in the coming months we will issue an analysis focusing on the perception of Antisemitism among young European Jews.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Union was built on the values of respect for human dignity, human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. We have the obligation to protect and strengthen the richness of Jewish culture and diversity and its contribution to Europe. With all these initiatives, I sincerely hope that the efforts countering Antisemitism advanced by this Commission will become a turning point for the Jewish people in Europe.

Jewish people should never again have to ask themselves whether they or their children have a future in Europe. They should never have to question whether the authorities will stand on their side to guarantee their safety. Nobody should ever be afraid to go to a synagogue or wear a kippah in the European

Union.