



## The EU Cannot Fight Antisemitism Effectively

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** For operational and structural reasons, the EU cannot effectively combat antisemitism. The main operational reasons are the absence of an accepted definition of antisemitism and the lack of comparable statistics on incidents among EU member states. Structural reasons are the unwillingness of the EU to admit that antisemitism is part of European culture, and the inability to simultaneously incite against Israel and fight antisemitism. The discrepancy between the words of EU leaders about their intention to fight antisemitism and the need to act against it will thus remain huge.

There has been an explosive growth in antisemitism since the beginning of this century in many EU countries. Occasionally European leaders mention that it is a huge problem that has to be fought. In December 2017, EU Commission First VP Frans Timmermans said antisemitism is “disturbingly normalized in Europe and those who want to defend Christian values should stay well away from antisemitism.” Yet when the EU appointed a coordinator to combat antisemitism in 2015, the resources given to her were minute.

European Commission President Jean Claude Juncker said in January 2019 on International Holocaust Remembrance Day: “We will not tolerate any form of antisemitism, from everyday hate speech, offline and online, to physical attacks. The European Commission is working hand-in-hand with all member states to combat this menace and guarantee the security of Jewish communities in Europe. Our Union was built on the ashes of the Holocaust. Remembering it and fighting antisemitism is our duty toward the Jewish community and indispensable to protect our common European values.” Around the same time, EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini said, “The European Union has always been and stays engaged against any form of antisemitism, including attempts to condone, justify or trivialize the Holocaust.”

In January 2019, EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Vera Yourova, said: "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." She listed four areas through which the EU Commission will fight antisemitism: 1) security of Jewish communities and premises, 2) education and Holocaust remembrance, 3) increasing awareness of antisemitism as a problem by making use of the IHRA definition and by better data collection of antisemitic incidents, and 4) supporting the development of national strategies.

This may sound promising to the uninformed. It is, however, far too little and far too late. Yourova noted that a precondition for fighting antisemitism is the establishment of an accepted definition. The sole candidate is that of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). Yourova said she accepted this definition in 2017 as a basis for the work on countering antisemitism. Well and good, but it raises a major question: Why has only this one EU Commissioner accepted the IHRA definition rather than the entire Commission?

The IHRA definition has been accepted for internal use by seven EU states: the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria. When the definition was accepted by the IHRA in May 2016, approval was required of all its members. These include the great majority of EU members.

Much more important than the EU's fight against antisemitism in past decades is the massive immigration of antisemites from Muslim countries where the percentage of antisemitic citizens is among the highest in the world. Among these millions of immigrants the percentage of antisemites is also far higher than that of native Europeans.

The EU Commission cannot claim innocence on this matter. Frits Bolkestein was the Dutch EU Commissioner from 1999 to 2004. He told me more than ten years ago, "In the European Commission, I twice tried to raise the problem of the multicultural society and the risks of unlimited Muslim immigration. My colleagues...did not want to discuss it. I said to one Commissioner that they almost considered me a racist. He replied: 'Drop the word 'almost.'"

In January 2019, the European Commission published its Eurobarometer 484 study, entitled *Perceptions of Antisemitism*. This study contains data on perceptions of antisemitism among citizens of all member states. The researchers found that 50% of respondents think antisemitism is a problem in their country. These include 15% who consider it a very important problem. There is, however, a huge gap between awareness of antisemitism and effectively fighting it.

One further important operational reason why the EU cannot fight antisemitism is that it has no common standards for incidents. Reliable statistics about incidents according to common criteria are needed. There are even countries that do not provide

statistics at all. From Yourova's words one sees that after more than 18 years of greatly increased antisemitism, the collection of uniform data on incidents in the EU still remains beyond the horizon.

Beyond operational reasons, there are two structural causes that prevent the EU from effectively fighting antisemitism. Almost nobody in Europe who is not Jewish has dared to state the truth: Antisemitism is an integral part of European culture. The history of many EU member states is characterized far more by the antisemitism interwoven within it than by democracy.

Antisemitism is many centuries old. While it has had ups and downs, it has never gone away in these European countries. Antisemitism is much older than the values in addition to democracy the EU considers to be fundamental: respect for human dignity, human rights, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law.

To fight antisemitism effectively, the EU has to admit this up front. That means it has to order from genuine scholars – not from whitewashers of antisemitism – in-depth studies on the meaning of ingrained aspects of antisemitism in European culture and how they are promoted. This includes investigating the level of citizens' agreement with stereotypes about Jews and antisemitic accusations against them. Research should also be done on the spread of the word "Jew" as a curse word in various countries, the way Jews are presented in schoolbooks, and so on.

There is a second major structural reason why the EU cannot effectively fight antisemitism. One cannot simultaneously incite against Israel, the only state with a Jewish majority, and fight antisemitism. As this is the reality, it becomes clear why the EU does not want to accept the IHRA definition which, *inter alia*, states that singling out Israel is antisemitic.

The EU does commit this antisemitic singling out. For example, it decided to label goods from the disputed West Bank but not from any territories occupied by a variety of other states. As jurists Avi Bell and Eugene Kontorovich pointed out: "The EU does not have a general set of rules for dealing with occupied territories, settlements or territorial administrations whose legality is not recognized by the EU. Rather, the EU has special restrictions aimed at Israel." Israel's Ministry of Strategy has also published data on the transfer of funds by the EU to Israel boycott organizations.

The UN General Assembly performs an antisemitic act every time it singles Israel out for condemnation, as it does in many resolutions. If one collects data on the voting records of many EU states on these resolutions, their major participation in this antisemitic process becomes evident.

For the EU to effectively fight antisemitism it has first to admit that antisemitism is ingrained in its culture and also change its biased attitude toward Israel. From there,

the way to effectively fight antisemitism is still arduous and long. As there is no indication that the EU is willing to openly admit to the reality, the discrepancy between the words of its leaders and the need to take action will remain huge.

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