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EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism

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Two weeks ago, on 5 October 2021, the Commission adopted its EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life.

Last week, President Ursula von der Leyen presented the Strategy at the Malmö International Forum where 50 Heads of states and government, ministers, IT platforms and NGOs and Jewish community representatives pledged fresh commitments to ensure Holocaust remembrance and step up the fight against antisemitism.

The EU pledged its strategy, the first of its kind, to combat antisemitism and foster Jewish life, including many concrete actions.

I remember vividly **Senator Segre's speech** in the hemicycle of the European Parliament at the occasion of International Holocaust Remember Day 2020. She said "I'm afraid I have lived long enough to see things that I thought History would have finally discarded, but they were only dormant."

This sentence found its way into our strategy. Antisemitism has never been gone, but now, three generations after the end of the Shoah it is expressed more overtly, more explicitly and more shameless again. Hate speech and conspiracy myths on the internet have led to radicalisation, to lethal attacks by Islamists and right-wing extremists. During the **Covid-19 pandemic** we've seen a resurgence of centuries-old conspiracy myths

fuelling new forms of antisemitism online. Jewish people have been blamed for creating the virus, for developing vaccines to make a profit. Yellow stars of David reading “unvaccinated” are worn by protesters against Corona measures. What a trivialization of the Holocaust!

A study we commissioned to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, published in June 2021, showed that there was a **seven-fold increase** in antisemitic postings **on French language social media accounts** during the pandemic, and over a **thirteen-fold increase in German language accounts**.

Nine of 10 European Jews consider that antisemitism has increased in their country. Very worryingly 38% have considered emigrating because they do not feel safe as Jews in the European Union. When Jews have left Europe in the past, it’s never been good for Europe.

Antisemitism goes against everything the EU stands for and with this strategy the Commission committed, to step up the fight against antisemitism in Europe. **Antisemitism is not a problem of the Jews, but of the antisemites.** With our actions, we want to reach out to the public at large, because fighting antisemitism and racism is a **responsibility of all of us**.

- The strategy is founded on **three pillars**:

- 1. Preventing and combating all forms of antisemitism**
- 2. Protecting and fostering Jewish life in the EU**
- 3. Education, research and Holocaust remembrance.**

This strategy **links up to our broader efforts on combating all forms of hatred, discrimination and racism**.

I will not go into the details of each action, but mention a few key elements of the Strategy.

[1st Pillar]

- On **preventing and combating all forms of antisemitism** a key priority will be to tackle antisemitism online.

There are four important aspects:

- 1. Since 2008 speech inciting to hatred and violence is criminalised, this **includes Holocaust denial and trivialization**. The European Commission has started to open infringement procedures against member states where this is not yet the case¹. Hate speech is not free speech.
- The **Digital Services Act** as just presented by European parliament Rapporteur Christel Schaldemose, will further strengthen the legal possibilities to ensure the internet platforms can be held accountable, as authorities and users have among other more transparency about data and money flows, algorithms, redress mechanisms and reporting structures.
- 2. What is illegal offline is also illegal online. We urge Member states to **bring online perpetrators to justice**.
- 3. Strengthen users: As part of the strategy, we aim to establish a **Europe-wide network of trusted flaggers and fact-checkers**, including Jewish organisations, to step up the removal of illegal online hate speech to develop accurate counter-narratives.
- 4. We will cooperate with industry and IT companies to **prevent the illegal displaying and selling of Nazi-related symbols**, memorabilia and literature online. In some member states the selling or displaying of Nazi memorabilia are band while it is allowed in others. However, via the internet such items can be bought even in

¹ This does not apply to Denmark. According to Protocol 22 attached to the Treaty of Lisbon, Denmark is exempt from any EU criminal law instrument.

countries where the selling is otherwise band. Solutions need to be found with the platforms to ensure the law in the countries are respected.

- Another important aspect in the fight against discrimination is data **collection and recording of incidents**. Together with EU Member states we want to develop a unified methodology to ensure proper recording across Europe
- This also necessitates improving reporting structures and victim support. 8/10 Jews in Italy do not report the most serious incidents they encounter.

[2nd Pillar]

- Let me come to the second pillar, which is about **protecting and fostering Jewish life in the EU**.
- Ensuring the security of the Jewish community, just like for any other minority and citizens, is the responsibility of the Member States. Nonetheless, we know well that most Jewish communities had to invest and are still investing a lot in funding in their own security measures, including manpower. So we will work with Member States to improve. We will **increase EU funding for projects aiming to better protect public spaces and places of worship**. The next call for proposals will be published in 2022 for an amount to 24 million euros.
- By the way, according to our survey Italy in 2018 is on top of the list – 8/10 Jews think that the government responds well to the security needs. But only 3/10 think that the government's efforts to combat antisemitism are sufficient.
- The objective of this strategy is **also to foster Jewish life and allow it to flourish as part of an inclusive and diverse EU**.
- Despite the long-standing presence of Jews in Europe, and this is especially the case for Italy, people have little knowledge of Jewish life, traditions and Judaism. 61% think that Italians are not well informed about the history and customs of Italian Jewish people.

- So we will to work closely with the Jewish communities to help **safeguard Jewish heritage, raise awareness and increase mutual understanding** around Jewish life, including through a significant increase in project funding.

[3rd Pillar]

- **Education, research and Holocaust remembrance** is the third pillar of the strategy.
- To shape Europe's future, we need to understand our past. Knowledge about Jewish life, antisemitism and the impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish people are essential to understand antisemitism today, and prevent such atrocities from happening again.
- Only 48% Italians think that the Shoah is sufficiently taught in Italian schools and I was pleased to hear that Minister Bianchi who represented Italy, pledged in Malmö to upscale education about the Shoah.
- There is nothing more powerful than the testimony of Shoah survivors. But as the last survivors are leaving us, we will have to find new ways of remembrance. We will notably support **a new network of Young European Ambassadors** to promote Holocaust remembrance. This may go well together with the pledge of Italy in Malmö to call a competition "Young people remembering the Shoah" together with UCEI.
- We will **support through EU funding the creation of a network of places "Where the Holocaust happened"**. To highlight not only the extermination camps but also often unknown, hiding places, or train stations that served as deportation points. Our aim is to show how local the Shoah took place, by facilitating visits and interactive learning.
- We will support financially the **training of educational professionals and policy makers** on "addressing antisemitism through education, **working together with UNESCO and the OSCE**. This might go hand in hand with Italy's announcement in Malmö that the Ministry of Education is drawing up guidelines for combating antisemitism, for schools and teacher training".

- Research is also key. The Commission has supported the creation of the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure with 25 million euros since 2010. We **encourage Italy to financially support the new Member States based EHRI structure.**
- Now we propose the **creation of a European research hub** on contemporary antisemitism and Jewish life. As most of the research on antisemitism is done outside the EU, and that chairs on antisemitism and Jewish life are only loosely connected across Europe.

[Leading the Global fight]

- Finally, this strategy seeks to place the EU firmly in the **lead of the global fight against antisemitism**, complementing measures within the EU with external action along all the three pillars, by working more closely together with partner countries, including Israel, and multilateral organisations.
- The EU is founded on a strong commitment to promote and protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law worldwide.
- Any form of antisemitism, incitement to hatred or violence is incompatible with the EU values, including in school text books.
- We are determined to **ensure that EU external funds may not be misallocated** to activities that incite hatred and violence, including against Jewish people.

[Conclusion]

- This strategy is our commitment to a future for Jewish life in Europe and beyond. But we cannot do this alone.
- We invite Member States to work together with us in this commitment. Italy is an important partner. It has already adopted the IHRA definition and appointed a National Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism, Professor Milena Santerini.

- The National Strategy for Combating Antisemitism was presented to the Government last September and as Minister Bianchi said in Malmö, all Italian institutions are now called upon to implement the recommendations contained therein, in line with the IHRA's definition of antisemitism.
- We intend to closely follow up and monitor the implementation, with a first review foreseen in 2024.

- We close our strategy with a quote of another Italian Holocaust survivor, Primo Levi: "It happened, therefore it can happen again".
- This strategy is the EU's commitment to ensuring a future for Jewish life in Europe and beyond. We owe it to those who perished in the Holocaust, we owe it to the survivors and we owe it to future generations.
- Europe can only prosper when its Jewish communities prosper too.