Katharina von Schnurbein

Leadership Talk by the European Commission Coordinator on Combating Antisemitism

Even today, the Jewish community of Vienna sets an excellent example of a positive interaction between the community and wider society, thanks to organizations such as the Makkabi Sports Club, the Maimonides Center, the Job Training Centre JBBZ, the psychosocial center ESRA, to name a few. The fact that Jewish life was revived at all in such a way after the Shoah was certainly not a given and testifies to the inherent strength of the community here in Vienna.

At the European Commission, we are very much aware that Europe has a specific obligation to protect and support Jewish life. Europe would not be Europe without its two thousand years of European Jewish history, cherishing the continuation of this special symbiosis. The European Commission is about supporting vibrant Jewish life across Europe, and all our antisemitism policies are geared towards it.

With this contribution, I will add a European perspective to our reflections on how to tackle this cancer and prevent it from spreading its malignant manifestations further across European societies and indeed to end antisemitism. While none of us are naïve enough to think that this will be any time soon, I like the exclamation mark in the title of “An End to Antisemitism!” If we do not aim for the maximum, we will not achieve the minimum.

Antisemitism is not a national problem only! It is a European one. It touches the very heart of the European project. And it needs to be tackled with the greatest rigor on all levels, European, national and local. Yet, in Europe at the start of 2018, antisemitic prejudices are found in all forms, in all countries, irrespective of the size of the Jewish community, and in all strata of society. Sometimes violent, sometimes “only” as oral pinpricks, by questioning the right to a Jewish identity in public.

Where antisemitic incidents are recorded properly, figures are record-high: Four antisemitic incidents per day were recorded in Germany and the UK (in 2017)¹ and France (in 2016),² while in all European countries the Jewish community represents significantly less than one percent of the population.

¹ Cf., e.g., F. Jansen, “Pro Tag im Schnitt vier antisemitische Straftaten,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, February 11, 2018, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/hass-gegen-juden-in-deutschland-pro-tag>

I was shocked to see the demonstrations in December in the heart of our cities, London, Paris, Vienna, and Berlin. People took to the streets in Europe to burn Star-of-David flags and chant antisemitic slogans in protest of the announcement by President Trump of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.³ As a German, seeing such actions in front of the Brandenburg Gate and 200 meters away from the Holocaust Memorial gave me shivers. In Gothenburg, young people had to hide in the basement of the synagogue as burning objects were thrown onto the premises⁴—this all is happening in Europe in 2017!

On behalf of the European Commission, First Vice President Timmermans and Commissioner Jourová condemned these actions and attacks and stressed the need to bring the perpetrators to justice.⁵

Acknowledgement of the Problem for Society at Large

Europe is at a crossroad and rising antisemitism is only one alarm bell. While Jews have been ringing it for some time, certainly since the brutal killing of Ilan Halimi in France in 2006,⁶ the general public has remained largely ignorant of these developments. For example, while an average of eight of ten German

im-schnitt-vier-antisemitische-straftaten/20949750.html; N. Khomami, “Antisemitic incidents in UK at all-time high,” *The Guardian*, February 1, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/feb/01/antisemitic-incidents-in-uk-at-all-time-high>.

2 Cf., e.g., Sh. Sitbon, “Antisemitic Attacks Surge in France,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, February 9, 2018, <https://www.thejc.com/news/world/antisemitic-attacks-surge-in-france-1.458478>.

3 Cf., e.g., “Demonstranten verbrennen israelische Flaggen in Berlin,” *Welt.de*, December 9, 2017, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article171430290/Demonstranten-verbrennen-israelische-Flaggen-in-Berlin>; “Demonstrators in Stockholm Set Fire to Israeli Flag,” *The Local*, December 9, 2017, <https://www.thelocal.se/20171209/demonstrators-in-stockholm-set-fire-to-israeli-flag>; “Protesters Rally in Paris a Day Ahead of Netanyahu Visit,” *The Times of Israel*, December 9, 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/protesters-gather-in-paris-over-jerusalem-a-day-ahead-of-netanyahu-visit/>.

4 Cf. Ch. Anderson, “Three Arrested After Firebomb Attack on Swedish Synagogue,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/10/world/europe/sweden-synagogue-molotov-cocktail.html>.

5 Cf. European Commission, “Joint-statement by First Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Jourová on the Recent Antisemitic Attacks and Demonstrations,” issued December 11, 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-17-5207_en.htm.

6 Cf. C. S. Smith, “Torture and Death of Jew Deepen Fears in France,” *The New York Times*, March 5, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/05/world/europe/torture-and-death-of-jew-deepen-fears-in-france.html>.

Jews see antisemitism as a worrying rising threat, statistics show that only two members of the general public regard antisemitism as a significant threat.⁷ This is due to little reporting in the media, although, following recent incidents, reporting about antisemitism has increased in some countries.

As the oldest minority in Europe, the Jewish people have been perceived for centuries as the emblematic “Other.” It is often said that when antisemitism is on the rise, “something bigger” is going on. Indeed the spread of Jew-hatred in a society has led time and again to the decay of openness of that society.

Jew-hatred is therefore not only a threat to the Jews but also a threat to an open and diverse society in which communities and people of various cultural backgrounds and faiths can live together based on the rule of law. Antisemitism is the “canary in the coal mine,” indicating that hatred elsewhere in society will increase. And thus we witness significant racism and xenophobia perceived by Muslim, Roma, and other minorities as was shown by the EU Midis Survey.⁸

Acknowledging All Forms of Antisemitism

Antisemitism has been—and still is—expressed in various forms. Some point currently to the Muslim community as a source of “imported antisemitism.” Indeed, according to the ADL Global Antisemitism Survey, anti-Jewish prejudices are two to three times higher among Muslims than among the general population.⁹ It is necessary to address these prejudices and not apply an ostrich policy under the false pretext that this might be offensive. Instead, addressing the issue strengthens the back of those courageous—often Muslim—people who fight antisemitic attitudes among the Muslim community. I am pleased to see that here in Austria the Muslim Youth Austria (MJÖ) has started a project together with the Documentation Centre of the Austrian Resistance (DÖW) to address antisemitism among Muslim young people.¹⁰ As you know, addressing antisemitism (and other

⁷ Cf. Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University, “Antisemitism Worldwide 2017 Report,” issued April 11, 2018, <https://eurojewcong.wpengine.com/resources/antisemitism-worldwide-2017-report/>, 39–43.

⁸ Cf. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey: Muslims – Selected Findings* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017).

⁹ Cf. Anti-Defamation League, “ADL Global 100: An Index of Anti-Semitism,” <http://global100.adl.org/>.

¹⁰ Cf. B. Ichner, “Junge Muslime wollen Antisemitismus bekämpfen,” *Kurier*, January 24, 2018,

forms of racism and discrimination) in your own ranks is always the most difficult. It is indeed a benchmark for successful integration. I applaud the MJÖ for this project. We need many more such initiatives across Europe.

At the same time, we need to acknowledge reality: what do new-comers or those with migrant backgrounds see when scratching the surface of convictions among European society in a broader sense? Our continent has witnessed centuries of racist and Christian antisemitism and persecution, initiated and followed-through by Nazi Germany, supported by collaboration in many countries that made the dimension of this industrial killing in the Shoah possible. Yet, Holocaust denial and distortion coming from the extreme right is still a flourishing industry and must be addressed in public discourse as well as by the judiciary. European legislation criminalizes Holocaust denial inciting hatred and violence, and we are pressing Member States to apply this legislation with rigor.

On the left political spectrum, we see antisemitism hiding behind anti-Zionism and bias against Israel. The Middle East conflict has been imported not only by migrants coming from the region but also by those intellectuals, activists and politicians who occasionally cross the red line from criticizing Israel's policies to antisemitism. No conflict anywhere in the world justifies attacks on Jews in Europe—oral or physical ones.

Finally, the most widespread form of antisemitism is conspiracy theories that can be found on the left, the right, and among the Muslim population, reaching right into the middle of society. As a result, school principals do not address antisemitism properly and thus the victim rather than the perpetrators leaves the school, judges justify an arson attack on a synagogue by Palestinians with reference to their political convictions, and police make the wrong judgement call when an anti-Israel demonstrations become antisemitic.¹¹

The European Commission is committed to fight antisemitism in all its forms whether coming from the right-wing, the left-wing, from with the Muslim community, or the middle of society. We need to tackle this challenge holistically.

Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW), starting 2018, <https://www.mjoe.at/projekte/musliminnen-gegen-antisemitismus/>.

¹¹ Cf. S. Laurin, "Wuppertal und die Brandstifter," *Jüdische Allgemeine*, January 12, 2017, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/article/view/id/27477>; B. Schrep, "Sechs Brandsätze in der Nacht," *Spiegel online*, January 18, 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/brandans-chlag-auf-synagoge-in-wuppertal-taeter-erneut-vor-gericht-a-1072396.html>; S. Wildman, "German Court Rules That Firebombing a Synagogue Is Not Anti-Semitic," *Vox*, January 13, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/1/13/14268994/synagogue-wuppertal-anti-semitism-anti-zionism-anti-israel>.

Policies are Needed on European, National, and Local Levels

The EU is based on the Lisbon Treaty that defines the competencies on a European and national level. And, in fact, many of the issues that need to be tackled in the fight against antisemitism, like security, integration, training of state administration, teacher training, curricula are national responsibilities. Thus, each Member State has its own approach, according to its structures and history. The EU's added value in these areas is to share best practices among them and provide certain impetus for Member States.

To tailor our policies, we need to know how the Jewish communities across Europe regard the threat of antisemitism and what their possible reactions are. Are they sitting on packed suitcases, are they moving to different neighborhoods, have they stopped wearing a kippah for security concerns?

In this vein, the European Commissioner for Justice, Vera Jourová this year invited the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency, based here in Vienna, to conduct the largest ever survey among 16,500 European Jews in twelve countries. In a representative way of ninety-five percent of European Jews will have a say.¹² The survey will allow a country by country comparison and thus allow Member States to take appropriate action. The survey also provides stakeholders with evidence to examine progress in ensuring the protection of Jewish people's fundamental rights in line with existing EU law and policies.

You Can't Fight it if You Can't Define it

In order to achieve a change of mind that antisemitism needs to be addressed on all levels, I have used every occasion—often together with the local Jewish community—to reach out to relevant national ministers and ministries, to Council working groups, to the EU Presidencies and to international organizations. We have seen encouraging change in the level of awareness. We think that policy de-

¹² Published in December 2018, it is entitled *Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism: Second Survey on Discrimination and Hate Crime against Jews in the EU*. The foreword reads: "The findings make for a sobering read. They underscore that antisemitism remains pervasive across the EU – and has, in many ways, become disturbingly normalized. The important information provided herein can support policymakers across the EU in stepping up their efforts to ensure the safety and dignity of all Jewish people living in the EU." FRA, *Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018), 3.

velopments can be mutually reinforcing when exchanged and coordinated among Special Envoys on Antisemitism, and I am pleased that one third of EU Member States have put such a contact point in place.

Following the adoption of the non-legally binding working definition on antisemitism by IHRA in May 2016,¹³ the European Parliament adopted the definition in a Resolution on Antisemitism on June 1, 2017. Since then, six Member States have adopted the Definition (United Kingdom, Austria, Denmark, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania).¹⁴ Member States have started using the definition as guidance in their training of police and judges. The European Commission has also started staff training on current forms of antisemitism on the basis of the definition.

In the context of “You can’t fight it if you can’t define it,” the definition can be a useful tool for NGOs, Jewish communities, and state authorities to recognize the various forms of antisemitism. This definition will hopefully help improve data collection of antisemitic incidents. It is important to make antisemitism more visible, because without data, efforts to combat antisemitism will remain general and untargeted.

Ensure Proper Data Recording of Hate Crime and Antisemitic Incidents

Every year in November, the Fundamental Rights Agency publishes an annual report on antisemitic hate crimes in each EU Member State. Last year again, eight Member States reported no antisemitic acts.¹⁵ Many countries do not categorize the political convictions of the perpetrators of antisemitic hate crime. Often, all antisemitic hate crimes are simply categorized as right wing because this is where antisemitism predominately came from in the past. Of course, we

13 International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, “Working Definition of Antisemitism,” issued May 26, 2016, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/stories/working-definition-antisemitism>.

14 Additional countries have adopted and endorsed the Working Definition of Antisemitism until today: Israel (January 22, 2017), City of London (February 8, 2017), Scotland (April 27, 2017), Germany (September 20, 2017), and the Republic of Macedonia (March 6, 2018). Cf. “Working Definition of Antisemitism,” International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, July 19, 2018, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/news-archive/working-definition-antisemitism>.

15 Cf. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, “Antisemitism: Overview of Data Available in the European Union 2006–2016,” Issued November 2017, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/antisemitism-overview-2007–2017>.

would be making a mistake in belittling that threat. In countries where data is collected properly—usually with the help of community based NGOs that collaborate closely with the police—a record number of antisemitic incidents, ranging from verbal and online threats to assaults, were recorded in 2017.

In order to improve data collection on hate crime, the European Commission installed in June 2016 a permanent group under the leadership of the Fundamental Rights Agency to improve proper recording. It is the first step in ensuring that offenses are investigated and, where necessary, prosecuted in all twenty-eight EU Member States.

Beyond Holocaust Education

President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, stressed on Holocaust Remembrance Day last month that we have a responsibility as Europeans not only to remember the Shoah as part of our history but also to pass on these lessons to the next generation. Education about the Holocaust, as the abyss of our common European history, can help to build resilience in society against discrimination, racism, and antisemitism when taught in an appropriate manner.¹⁶

However, even in countries like Germany where the Holocaust is anchored in school curricula—which is not the case in all Member States—the minority of teachers are confronted with it in the course of their studies. Often learning about the Holocaust is consigned to history teachers. And teaching about modern forms of antisemitism reaches even fewer students. The truth is even the sports teacher needs to recognize an antisemitic remark made on the school court and be able to address it. We are pleased that the OSCE/ODHIR is currently working on educational materials for teacher education and guidance for difficult situations in the classroom related to antisemitism, and we will support their efforts to reach all EU Member States with the findings.

To practice what we preach, at the Commission, we hold an annual internal EU staff training on the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day on the role of civil servants in bringing about the Holocaust. A separate staff training session on modern forms of antisemitism is held every year on the 9th of November to commemorate *Kristallnacht* (Nov. 9–10, 1938).

¹⁶ Cf. European Commission, “Message by President Jean-Claude Juncker on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day 2018,” issued January 26, 2018, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-18-393_en.htm.

Addressing Illegal Online Hatred

Given the significant rise of racist and antisemitic content on the internet, the European Commission concluded in May 2016 a Code of Conduct with the big IT companies to more quickly remove illegal hate speech.¹⁷ Facebook, Microsoft, YouTube, and Twitter have committed to reviewing and, when necessary, taking down illegal hate speech within 24 hours according to European legislation. Our latest data shows the continuous progress on the removal of illegal hate speech with seventy percent of illegal hate speech removed and over eighty percent being reviewed within 24 hours. Work remains to be done, in particular in relation to user's transparency (meaning proper feedback), which is an important guarantee for freedom of expression online, in line with the Guidance provided in the September Commission's Communication.

Given the good progress, the Commission has been focusing attention on ensuring the Code becomes an industry standard and encouraging the on-boarding of as many relevant social media platforms as possible. Good progress has also been recorded here with Instagram and Google+ announcing on January 19, 2018 their intention to join the Code of Conduct.¹⁸

The Ultimate Aim: Normality for Jews in Europe!

While all of these measures are necessary at the moment, we must never lose sight of the ultimate goal of Jewish life in Europe: normality. Jews should be able to make the same choices as anybody else, religious or secular, wearing Jewish symbols or not, putting a Mezuzah on their door or not, sending their kids to public schools or Jewish schools—without having to go through three layers of security.

And by the way, it is unacceptable for the Jewish communities to have to bear the costs for this security. Ensuring the security of its citizens is one of the most generic responsibilities of the state. I was pleased to have been invited by the Austrian Ministry of Interior last December to a meeting of the future EU

¹⁷ Cf. European Commission, "Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online," issued May 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/code_of_conduct_on_countering_illegal_hate_speech_online_en.pdf.

¹⁸ Cf. European Commission, "Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online—Commission Initiative Shows Continued Improvement, Further Platforms join," issued January 19, 2018, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-261_en.htm.

Presidencies to talk about the specific security needs for Jewish communities. We are working with the Austrian EU Presidency in the second half of 2018 to focus specifically on security as well as the recognition of all forms of antisemitism.

I mentioned in the beginning that when antisemitism is on the rise, something bigger is going on. That is true. But the reverse is also true: Accepting Jewish life in its diversity as an integral part of Europe is a sign of a healthy society. Accepting Jewish life as normality will send positive vibes into the wider society to stand up against any form of racism and xenophobia. It is thus in the interest and the responsibility of every single European to put “An End to Antisemitism!” So, in order to put “An End to Antisemitism,” let us not be by-standers. Condemning and pushing back on antisemitism is a continuous and repetitive exercise. Civil courage is a state of mind.

Katharina von Schnurbein was appointed as the first European Commission Coordinator on combatting Antisemitism in December 2015. In close cooperation with and Jewish communities as well as EU Member States her aim is to advance effective policy measures on Antisemitism across the EU. Before that she advised EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso on the dialogue with churches, religions and non-confessional organizations. Prior to that she served as spokesperson for employment and social affairs at the European Commission (2004–2010).

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