

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life (2021-2030)**

(2022/C 375/04)

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### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. welcomes the communication of the EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life (2021-2030), and agrees with the European Commission that the fight against antisemitism is a complex challenge, as antisemitism poses a threat to the fundamental European values. Through active involvement, the European Committee of the Regions could contribute to the European Commission's EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life (2021-2030) by ensuring that local and regional authorities are involved in its implementation. Believes that an EU without antisemitism must be the common goal of all local and regional authorities in the EU;
2. is concerned about the findings of the second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU, *Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism*, 2018 produced by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), which confirmed that nine out of ten Jews believe that antisemitism has increased in their country, and that 85 % of Jews consider antisemitism to be a serious problem;
3. welcomes the fact that the Commission's strategy is based on a wide consultation with relevant stakeholders, including national and regional authorities, Jewish communities and organisations, independent experts and researchers, the FRA, and international organisations and other stakeholders;
4. stresses that Jewish culture is an integral part of European culture, and that Jewish cultural heritage must be both protected and promoted in EU cities and regions in a way that drives Europeans to value and consider Jewish cultural heritage a vital part of Europe's culture and way of life. It must draw attention to the millennia of Jewish life traditions and to the countless important contributions made by people of Jewish belief or background to our shared society and culture. In this regard, believes that it is important to step up cooperation between regions and civil society;
5. welcomes the Commission's reaffirmation of its firm and unequivocal commitment to the global fight against antisemitism. Agrees that any form of antisemitism, incitement to hatred or violence is unacceptable and incompatible with the values and aims of the European Union and its Member States. These principles are non-negotiable. In light of the above, it is essential that all international, national and subnational authorities mainstream the prevention and countering of antisemitism in all its forms and across all policy areas;
6. welcomes the Commission's commitment to engaging in regular dialogue with the European Parliament and with the Member States' national parliaments to encourage firm action on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, and adds that extending the invitation to regional actors would further enhance the strategy's efficiency;
7. deems appropriate the strategy's conclusion that all forms of hatred undermine human value and are incompatible with the values for which the EU stands. While welcoming that this strategy is part of the Commission's efforts on combating all forms of hatred, discrimination, and racism, believes that it is necessary to go a step further and announce an antisemitism zero-tolerance principle;

8. recalls that based on article 17 TFEU the European Union needs to have an open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches, religious associations, and non-confessional organisations and that such a dialogue should also be developed by the Committee;

### **Preventing and combating all forms of antisemitism**

9. deems appropriate the strategy's conclusion that the most common manifestations of antisemitism today include Israel-related antisemitism, which are most commonly encountered online by Jews in Europe <sup>(1)</sup>;

10. fully supports the notion that it should become standard practice for Member States and their authorities to use the definition of antisemitism provided by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) to help them identify antisemitic patterns and various manifestations of antisemitism. Recognising an act as antisemitic and naming it as such creates trust in the authorities and the courts, and makes people more willing to report crimes motivated by antisemitism;

11. in accordance with the aforementioned definition: a.) antisemitic acts should be considered criminal offences when they are so defined by law (for example, denial of the Holocaust or distribution of antisemitic materials). Applying particularly hurtful or harmful terminology (Holocaust, genocide, apartheid) cannot be accepted as legitimate criticisms of Jewish groups or of the general aims or behaviours of the Jewish state; b.) criminal acts should be considered antisemitic when the targets of attacks, whether they are people or property — such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries — are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Jewish or linked to Jews; c.) antisemitic discrimination and denying Jews opportunities and services available to others should be prosecuted and punished;

12. welcomes the fact that Member States have endorsed the strategy and have already made the commitment to tackle antisemitism preventively and combat it using national strategies, and to counter other forms of discrimination, such as racism and xenophobia, and extremism. One such example is the Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025, on which the Committee of the Regions has also issued an opinion <sup>(2)</sup>;

13. approves of the strategy's statement that the key to success is the reinforced involvement of civil society organisations and Jewish communities, enhancing active collaboration with these entities and providing financial support for their initiatives through existing EU funding programmes, assigning specific funds to implement these goals;

14. welcomes the Commission's commitment to supporting organisations and projects to combat and record all forms of antisemitism through the funding of the EUR 1,55 billion Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme <sup>(3)</sup>, as well as a wide variety of other EU programmes <sup>(4)</sup>, thus addressing the transversal nature of antisemitism through tackling antijudaism and fight against questioning the legitimacy of the State of Israel, as well as attaching sufficient attention to Holocaust remembrance;

15. advocates, as a way of building trust in state action, appointing contact persons in national and regional security services and establishing communication channels and coordinated measures, particularly in the event of a crisis;

16. welcomes the Commission's decision to formalise the ad hoc Working Group on combating antisemitism as a permanent structure in order to support implementing the strategy and to help coordinate the endeavours of Member States, Jewish communities' representatives, and other stakeholders. Calls on the Commission to pay special attention to the complexity of European Jewish communities when choosing the working group representatives, to ensure that all denominations and religious movements are equally represented;

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<sup>(1)</sup> 79 % of European Jews feel blamed for something done by the State of Israel. 69 % say the Arab-Israeli conflict impacts on feeling of safety (Second FRA Survey 2018: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2018-experiences-and-perceptions-of-antisemitism-survey\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-experiences-and-perceptions-of-antisemitism-survey_en.pdf)).

<sup>(2)</sup> COR-2020-04617.

<sup>(3)</sup> C(2021) 2699 final: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/c\\_2021\\_2699\\_f1\\_commission\\_implementing\\_decision\\_en\\_v3\\_p1\\_1177590.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/c_2021_2699_f1_commission_implementing_decision_en_v3_p1_1177590.pdf); CERV programme: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/cerv>.

<sup>(4)</sup> Justice programme, Horizon Europe, Creative Europe, Erasmus+, the Internal Security Fund, the cohesion policy funds, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA).

17. is concerned about the fact that 44 % of young Jewish Europeans have experienced antisemitic harassment <sup>(5)</sup> and believes that there is a very urgent need to explicitly combat antisemitic hate speech and hate crimes, as well as violent extremism and terrorism against Jews. Expresses deep concern over a survey conducted by the Fundamental Rights Agency on Jewish people's experiences of hate crimes in 12 Member States of the Union, according to which 35 % of respondents have already been confronted with the statement that 'Jews exploit the victimhood of the Holocaust for their own purposes' <sup>(6)</sup>, while 53 % of Europeans feel that Holocaust denial is a problem in their country <sup>(7)</sup>. With this in mind, the Committee urges for the swift adoption of the European Commission proposal to extend the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime, which would allow establishing EU-wide minimum rules for the definition of criminal offences and sanctions;

18. agrees with the Commission that when implementing the strategy, both Member States and local and regional entities have a particularly important role to play when it comes to combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life. Commits itself to focusing more on the issue of antisemitism in the future in order to contribute to the implementation of the EU strategy on combating antisemitism and to promoting the exchange of good practices;

19. welcomes the Commission's European judicial training strategy for 2021-2024 to support training programmes and capacity-building activities on tackling antisemitism for justice and law enforcement professionals, including through the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN) and the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL). Awareness raising about antisemitism and adequate training should also be available to local and regional authorities;

20. underlines that it is particularly important that comparable data concerning expressions of antisemitism be compiled in the Member States, and that the methodology and the setting up of data collecting procedures be supported by targeted funds and programmes;

21. agrees with the Commission that combating antisemitism online deserves more attention. Points out that antisemitic conspiracy myths, Nazi-related symbols, memorabilia and literature, and their spread online can lead to radicalisation and, ultimately, physical violence. Because of this, the specific obligations for operators which are set out in their behaviour codex, the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act, are particularly important;

22. highlights the importance of paying more attention to how to deal with illegal content on social media platforms. Law enforcement, judiciary, and judicial civil procedures play a crucial role in achieving this. Statements made online or on social media that constitute a criminal offence should be consistently prosecuted, hence the Committee considers it necessary to strengthen EU and national legislations on this matter. It therefore urges Member States to swiftly and fully transpose and implement the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia <sup>(8)</sup>;

### Protecting and fostering Jewish life in the EU

23. welcomes the Commission's determination to support Member States and Jewish communities in strengthening the protection of synagogues and places of worship with EUR 24 million funding, and draws attention to the fact that the unified data collected on incidents could support the Commission, together with the European Union Intelligence and Situation Centre, to explore the specific threats to Jewish people, communities and places of worship in order to better understand, prevent, protect and respond to specific security risks;

24. highlights the fact that despite the long-standing presence of Jews in Europe, 68 % of Europeans say that they are 'not informed' about Jewish history <sup>(9)</sup>. Believes that increasing awareness and knowledge of Jewish history, religion and culture among young students needs to be a priority. The quality of teaching materials and teaching manuals is of particular importance here. It is essential to dismantle societal prejudices and to help promote full recognition that Jewish life is a part of European society;

<sup>(5)</sup> *Young Jewish Europeans: perceptions and experiences of antisemitism*, FRA, 2019: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2019-young-jewish-europeans\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-young-jewish-europeans_en.pdf).

<sup>(6)</sup> *Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism Second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU*, FRA, 2018: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2018-experiences-and-perceptions-of-antisemitism-survey\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-experiences-and-perceptions-of-antisemitism-survey_en.pdf).

<sup>(7)</sup> Special Eurobarometer 484, *Perceptions of antisemitism*, 2019: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2220>.

<sup>(8)</sup> Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=NLEX%3A32008F0913>.

<sup>(9)</sup> Surveys — Eurobarometer (europa.eu).

25. welcomes the Commission's recognition of the important role that sports and the media play in promoting inclusion, and points out that in addition to NGO initiatives, the active involvement of Jewish organisations and support through targeted programmes can be more effective in combating antisemitic stereotypes and misconceptions;

26. welcomes the European framework for action on cultural heritage<sup>(10)</sup> (which includes a specific measure on Jewish cemeteries in Europe), but also draws attention to the fact that there are numerous abandoned synagogues and other orphaned Jewish community sites in Europe. In addition to regional aid, further programmes would be needed to strengthen Europe's cultural roots by restoring these important places and protecting them from vandalism;

27. welcomes the Commission's commitment to education and research on Jewish life, antisemitism, and the Holocaust, and the acknowledgement that they are essential to understanding antisemitism today and to preventing such atrocities from ever happening again. Nevertheless, the limited scope of the OSCE<sup>(11)</sup>/ODIHR<sup>(12)</sup> and UNESCO<sup>(13)</sup> programmes in some Member States needs to be strengthened;

### **Education, research and Holocaust remembrance**

28. welcomes the Commission's plan to fund an EU-wide survey on antisemitic prejudices all over the European Union, building also on the experience of numerous Member States<sup>(14)</sup>, as well as local and regional authorities across the EU;

29. emphasises that although education falls within the competences of the Member States, it is necessary to review educational material on Judaism, antisemitism, the Holocaust, and modern-day Israel used in European educational institutions. It should be borne in mind that such material should be in full compliance with the UNESCO standards of peace, tolerance, coexistence and non-violence. What is more, EU funds should be granted to financing textbooks which fulfil all the above mentioned UNESCO standards. Appropriate training of teachers at all levels of education, to address anti-Semitism and counter prejudice in and through education, is essential<sup>(15)</sup>. Sharing of best practices among education and training practitioners as well as different levels of governance in charge of designing and implementing education and training policies could further enhance the fight against misconceptions and stereotypes;

30. expresses its concern at the recurrence of anti-Semitic acts in schools and the increasing difficulty that some teachers are experiencing in teaching about the Shoah, and agrees that teachers should be empowered to address anti-Semitism, the Shoah, Jewish life and history, including in multicultural classrooms; stresses, therefore, the importance for Member States to provide teachers — especially history teachers — and school headmasters with enhanced pedagogical support in their teaching of the Second World War period and more generally when addressing the issue of anti-Semitism. Points out that in order to review and improve the teaching materials used in the Member States and regions, structured exchanges with teachers are particularly necessary;

31. welcomes that the Commission is continuing to finance actions in Member States to fight antisemitism systematically, as well as to foster Jewish life at local and regional level and to promote knowledge of current and former regional and local Jewish life, as well as exchanges with local communities; such actions should be backed also through EU programmes such as Horizon Europe and CERV;

32. strongly endorses international research projects on preventing antisemitism, such as comparative projects on how antisemitism is taught in schools, and calls for them to be specifically supported using European funding;

33. underlines the importance of commemorating the heroic stance of the non-Jewish people across Europe who sacrificed their lives to help Jews during the Shoah;

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<sup>(10)</sup> European framework for action on cultural heritage.

<sup>(11)</sup> OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

<sup>(12)</sup> ODIHR: OSCE office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

<sup>(13)</sup> UNESCO: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

<sup>(14)</sup> Kovács, A., Fischer, G., *Antisemitic Prejudices in Europe: Survey in 16 European Countries*, Action and Protection League, 2021: European antisemitism survey — APL — Action & Protection League (apleu.org).

<sup>(15)</sup> 'Addressing Anti-Semitism in Schools: Training Curricula', a publication developed jointly by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and UNESCO.

34. supports the coordinated and cross-border development of multilingual teaching materials on preventing antisemitism as well as teaching manuals that are digitally and freely accessible;
35. considers it essential to strengthen mechanisms to control the financing of groups which, under the guise of non-governmental organisations, harbour antisemitism, promote the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, or justify and encourage terrorism;
36. expresses its appreciation for the work of the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) <sup>(16)</sup> and deems it important that the future of trans-national Holocaust research, commemoration and education is secured beyond the project's expiry in 2024. This is the Holocaust research initiative that receives the most EU funding in the world;

#### **Leading the global fight against antisemitism**

37. welcomes the Commission's acknowledgment that Israel is a key partner for the European Union in the global fight against antisemitism. Furthermore, the Committee fully supports cooperation with the ad-hoc Working Group set up by the European Commission and with the European Parliament Working Group Against Antisemitism (WGAS);
38. underlines the importance of involving national, regional and local authorities, as well as Jewish communities and civil societies, in order to strengthen the action plan's legitimacy and to combat antisemitism in Europe more effectively. It is also important to share good practices between different countries and local and regional authorities, including the objectives and measures set out in education, legislation, or research which are elaborated by different levels of governance and civil society;
39. believes that as local and regional authorities are on the front line in combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, they should have the opportunity to participate in exchanges, regular consultations, and dialogues with the EU institutions;
40. expresses the Committee's availability to contribute, where appropriate, to the work of the ad-hoc Working Group on combating antisemitism set up by the Commission, and its willingness to invite the Group's representatives to relevant Committee meetings;
41. will follow the Commission's call to set a good example and improve the representativeness of CoR staff through recruitment and selection measures.

Brussels, 29 June 2022.

*The President*  
*of the European Committee of the Regions*  
Vasco ALVES CORDEIRO

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<sup>(16)</sup> <https://www.ehri-project.eu/>.