

## Keynote Speech

### Scene setter

You have been invited to give a keynote speech at the first Civil Society Forum on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, scheduled on 16-17 November 2022. The event is physical, taking place at the Hotel NHOW Brussels Bloom in Brussels.

Your speech is scheduled on the first day during the opening plenary from 13:30-14:00.

Other speakers are:

- Opening by 
- Welcome by **Vice-President Margaritis Schinas**, Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life, European Commission (video)

You will speak after VP Schinas.

Dear Participants, Dear Friends,

- It is a pleasure and an honour to be here with you today.
- I am happy to see so many people from different countries representing various organisations that are committed to fighting antisemitism and fostering Jewish life.
- In the past two decades, antisemitism has become more apparent.
- The taboo on antisemitism after the Holocaust broke down already many years ago.
- If it ever existed at all.
- We have witnessed a rise in antisemitism among right-wing, left-wing and Islamist extremists. Also, very worryingly, at the centre of society.
- The pandemic, the unprovoked military invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the economic crisis caused by high

energy prices, or the earlier financial crisis, are having an impact being felt by all citizens.

- Although the causes of these crises might be very different, they have a common outcome.
- They always lead to the Jews being scapegoated for causing the crises and to new forms of antisemitism emerging.
- Jewish people have been blamed for spreading Covid-19 and wanting to make profits from the vaccines.
- Jewish people are being blamed for the outbreak of war.
- And Russia is distorting history, using the pretext of fighting a 'noble cause' to justify its unprovoked military invasion, by claiming to fight neo-Nazism, and 'denazify' Ukraine.
- This propaganda could not be more cynical, knowing that its President has Jewish roots and lost family members in the Holocaust.
- Antisemitism is unacceptable and inexcusable.

- The EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life is the Commission's commitment to fight the hatred of Jews and ensure a future for Jewish life in the EU and beyond.
- But we cannot do this alone.
- We need to cooperate at all levels, from the international, to the national and local level.
- In that regard it is extremely important that, in line with the EU Strategy, the Member States committed in the Council Conclusions on combating racism and antisemitism to developing national strategies and endeavour to do so by the end of this year.
- More and more countries have adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism and are appointing special envoys.
- The Commission will keep encouraging Member States and partner countries to do so.

- And, in 2024, it will publish an implementation report of the EU Strategy that will include the monitoring of progress at the national level.
- The EU Strategy includes over ninety concrete actions. For fifty-five of those actions the implementation has already started.
- Today also marks the start of a new action: the development of the network of Young European Ambassadors for Holocaust Remembrance.
- The Holocaust is a defining legacy of European history. All European school children should learn about this darkest chapter of our history.
- Yet, one in twenty Europeans have never heard of the Holocaust.
- Manifestations of Holocaust denial, distortion and trivialisation are increasing.
- 53% of Europeans perceive Holocaust denial as being a problem in their country.

- Probably the biggest problem is that many people do not even recognise Holocaust denial or trivialisation when they hear it or see it in social media.
- Today, with the last survivors passing away and a diversifying and digitalising society, the conditions for remembrance have begun to change.
- I am very pleased to launch today the development of a network of Young European Ambassadors to promote Holocaust Remembrance.
- This network aims to ensure, for the coming decades, that young Europeans learn how to access and share accurate information about the Holocaust and can contribute to Holocaust remembrance in innovative ways.
- The ‘Mémorial de la Shoah’ will receive additional funding, to start preparatory works to develop this European network, and to reach out to Holocaust sites and institutions in six EU Member States.
- They will empower young Europeans to take ownership of the stories of Holocaust survivors.

- They will empower them to share their knowledge in school and take initiatives to commemorate and learn about the Holocaust.
- Later this year, the Commission will publish a call for proposals of ten million Euros under the Citizenship Equality Rights and Values Programme to support initiatives on Holocaust remembrance.
- Initiatives on empowering Young European Ambassadors for Holocaust Remembrance will have priority.
- Young people need to be empowered to act also online. To react to Holocaust distortion and denial and create counter narratives and educational material about the Holocaust.
- We encourage civil society organisations, meaning all of you, to think about concrete project proposals on how we can empower young people to become Ambassadors for Holocaust remembrance, and we encourage you to apply for this funding.

- The panel discussion that starts in a moment aims to highlight two remarkable initiatives that can be inspirational for what we aim to achieve at European level:
  - the French “Network of Young Ambassadors of memory” initiated by the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris, who will now start to expand its work to six EU Member States.
  - And “My Story is Your Story”, an initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel, which pairs young influencers with Holocaust survivors.
- Dear Friends,
- Antisemitism has been on the rise now for many years.
- But we have thriving Jewish communities in Europe, and your presence here shows there is a thriving civil society dedicated to combating antisemitism.



- Civil society organisations are the backbone of any healthy democratic society, and your actions can make a real difference in the fight against antisemitism.
- We count on you, civil society, to win this fight.
- The European Commission stands side-by-side with you.
- The final sentence of the EU Strategy states: Europe can only prosper when its Jewish communities prosper too, and we truly believe this.
- Thank you and I wish you all a successful conference.

**Civil Society Forum on Combatting Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life**  
**16-17 November 2022**  
**Brussels, NHOW Brussels Hotel**  
**Rue Royale 250, 1210 Brussels**

## **Background**

### **Civil Society Forum**

The Civil Society Forum is an action in the EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life. The forum will take place as a participatory networking event in Brussels. Representatives of civil society organisations, Jewish communities, museums, research centres, the EU institutions and others will come together to discuss the current challenges in combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, to learn more about EU funding opportunities, and above all to network, meet new people and brainstorm about strategies, actions and projects that can be developed to further step up the fight against antisemitism, and to foster Jewish life in the EU.

You will give a speech during the opening plenary of the forum on Wednesday 16 November, 13:30 – 14:00. At the Jour-Fixe in June, Vice-President Schinas asked to launch the network of young European Ambassadors to promote Holocaust remembrance at the Civil society forum.

The Memorial de la Shoah received an operating grant through the CERV programme. In your speech you will highlight that on top of this operating grant they have been granted additional funding (EUR 60.000) to start preparatory works to develop this European network, and to reach out to Holocaust sites and institutions in 6 EU member states.



### **EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life**

The EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life presented on 5 October 2021 sets out measures focusing on: (1) preventing and combating all forms of antisemitism; (2) protecting and fostering Jewish life in the EU; and (3) education, research and Holocaust remembrance.

The EU Strategy includes 95 actions of which 55 have been set in motion. Concrete deliverables include:

- Twice per year Working group on the implementation of the EU Strategy
- Support for projects on combating antisemitism and to promote Holocaust remembrance through the CERV programme.
- Initiated by Austria, in cooperation with FRA and the Commission, 11 EU Member States signed the Vienna Declaration committing to develop a common methodology on recording antisemitic incidents
- The Commission published a new call for proposals on the protection of public spaces in the amount of 14.5 mil euro. 9.6 mil euro are dedicated specifically to the protection of places of worship, which includes Jewish places of worship, schools and communities.

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- Conference on 'Freedom of religion with regard to religious slaughter' (20 October)

Upcoming initiatives include:

- Holocaust remembrance conference and start of process to support the development of a 'Network of places where the Holocaust happened' in January 2023.
- Awareness raising campaign on fostering Jewish life
- EU wide survey on antisemitic attitudes among the general population

### **Development of national strategies**

EU Member States reiterated their determination to combat antisemitism and committed to adopt national strategies on antisemitism by end 2022, in line with the strategy and the unanimously adopted Council Conclusions on combating racism and antisemitism on 4 March 2022.



The Commission will in 2024 publish a comprehensive implementation report on the EU Strategy that will include monitoring of progress at national level, taking into account the commitments made in the Council Declarations on antisemitism of 2018 and 2020.

Furthermore, the Commission encourages the Member States to appoint special envoys or coordinators on combating antisemitism and to adopt and actively use the IHRA definition.

### ***IHRA Definition of antisemitism***

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism is regarded as a victim-centred and rights-based tool to recognise all forms of contemporary antisemitism. It is non-legally binding and offers practical guidance for training purposes.

The Commission has been using it since 2017 as a practical guidance tool and intends to use it further. The European Parliament adopted it in 2017 and is referred to in two Council Declarations on fighting antisemitism in 2018 and 2020.

This definition has been endorsed/adopted by 31 countries (including Muslim countries like Albania), numerous local government around the world, many cities (including Vienna in 2017, Paris in Feb. 2021 and Madrid in Sept. 2021), dozens of universities, major sport and football clubs (including Chelsea, Borussia Dortmund). 18 EU Member States have in addition adopted it by parliamentary or government decision to lay out how they will use the definition (i.e. training of law enforcement agents, education sector).

### ***Holocaust denial, distortion and trivialisation***

The EU strongly condemned Iran President' Statement questioning whether the Holocaust has happened (September 19, 2022). The EU argued that such denial is insulting to the memory of the millions of people who died a terrible, inhuman death in the Holocaust. No one should ever forget the victims of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis and their proxies.

The EU has also condemn Russian propaganda claiming for the denazification of Ukraine, which are trivializing the Holocaust.

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Holocaust distortion has a corrosive effect for collective historic memory and for the resilience and cohesion of our democratic societies. It is for that reason that condoning, trivializing or denying the Holocaust is criminalized across the EU.

Manifestations of Holocaust denial, distortion and trivialisation are increasing. Those are often used to feed hatred against Jewish people and in an attempt to rewrite European and Jewish history.

**Defensives**

***What is the Commission's position on antisemitism?***

- The Commission stands firmly against all forms of antisemitism. Antisemitism is incompatible with Europe's core values and principles on which the EU is founded.
- The Commission actively fights against all forms of racism and xenophobia, including antisemitism, in line with the powers conferred on it by the Treaties.
- Rising antisemitism across Europe is a threat not only to Jewish communities, but to European societies as a whole. It is against our values. It is toxic to our democracy and European way of life.
- This strategy follows other initiatives, such as: the Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, the gender equality strategy, the LGBTIQ equality strategy, the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities and the action plan on integration and inclusion and the anti-racism action plan.
- Three generations after the Holocaust, antisemitism is dangerously on the rise again. Nine out of ten Jews consider that antisemitism has increased in their country. Every second European considers antisemitism as a problem.
- Recorded antisemitic incidents increase significantly, including online. Conspiracy myths and hatred online have led to radicalisation and even lethal attacks. (Jewish Museum in Brussels in 2014, the Hypercasher in Paris in 2015, or on the Synagogue in Halle in 2019).
- 38% of Jews have considered emigrating because they do not feel safe as Jews in the EU. And when Jews have left Europe in the past, it's never been good for Europe.
- Finally, given our history and given that it was antisemitism that led to the Holocaust, Europe has a duty to act. When we say "Never again", we mean it. This strategy is part of that determination.