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# What the EU Should do against Antisemitism: Toward a Strategic Paradigm of Prevention, Containment, and Deterrence

*“There is no greater mistake than to suppose that platitudes, smooth words, timid policies offer (...) a path to safety.”<sup>1</sup>*

Winston Churchill

Churchill’s quote summarizes the challenge we are facing today quite well. As all of Europe and not only its Jews are confronted with an ever-growing threat of lethal antisemitism, the response by European leaders to date has been limited. The reasons for Europe’s reluctance to act are multifold. However, they point to a major misconception about the nature of antisemitism which is not merely a prejudice but a worldview (“Weltanschauung”) and hence differs from racism and anti-Muslim hatred.

The struggle against antisemitism requires an effort by the whole of society and its institutions and must nowadays encompass confronting Islamism and the cultural-relativist Left, in addition to the traditional racist Far Right in order to bring actual results.

Moreover, due to a surge in terror attacks against Jewish targets throughout Europe, a response is required that reaches beyond soft power and requires the involvement of security forces, intelligence agencies, and potentially the military; it is a topic that needs to be addressed through the appropriate institutional channels.

This article will focus on the political, legal, and public frameworks that influence the fight against antisemitism. First, I will address efforts that have been undertaken by the EU to date to counter antisemitism in order to provide an overview of where things stand today. I will then discuss major challenges related to the battle against antisemitism, such as the importance of credibility in confronting antisemitism, the overall political climate, and the public’s bias against Israel. Based on these elaborations, I will introduce the strategic paradigm of prevention, containment, and deterrence that needs to be implemented in order to fight antisemitism in a comprehensive, credible, and effective manner.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Churchill, *Churchill by Himself: The Definitive Collection of Quotations*, ed. R. M. Langworth (Newburyport: Rosetta Books, 2013), 253.

## EU Measures to Counter Antisemitism

In 2004 the EU's Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) published its first survey on antisemitism. While the report acknowledged the rise in attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions, it downplayed the role of Muslims in being the leading perpetrators of such acts and did not consider hostility against Israel as antisemitic.<sup>2</sup>

Later reports by both the EUMC (2009) and Fundamental Rights Agency (2015) linked the increase in antisemitic attacks to the Middle East conflict.<sup>3</sup> According to the EUMC 2009 report, it is "reasonable to assume that anti-Semitism in European Muslim communities is directly linked with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."<sup>4</sup> Such an assertion suggests that antisemitism is the result of Israel's actions, a modernized version of the claim that the Jews are responsible for antisemitism.

In 2008 the European Council adopted a Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia, calling upon member states to ensure that public incitement to violence or hatred on grounds of race, religion, etc. are punishable. Antisemitism though was not particularly emphasized; in fact, it was only mentioned once in reference to an earlier decision.<sup>5</sup>

Five years later, in the Council conclusions on combating hate crime in the EU which called on member states to fully implement the Framework Decision, antisemitism was mentioned only alongside discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and homophobia but never highlighted or addressed on its own.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, *Manifestations of Antisemitism in the EU 2002–2003: Based on Information by the National Focal Points of the EUMC – RAXEN Information Network* (Vienna: EUMC, 2004), [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/184-AS-Main-report.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/184-AS-Main-report.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. A. Elman and M. Grimm, "Augmenting the European Union's Response to Antisemitism," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 10, no. 3 (2016): 461.

<sup>4</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Antisemitism: Summary Overview of the Situation in the European Union 2001–2008* (Vienna: FRA 2009), [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/347-Antisemitism\\_Update\\_2009.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/347-Antisemitism_Update_2009.pdf), 24.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Council of the European Union, "Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on Combating certain Forms and Expressions of Racism and Xenophobia by Means of Criminal Law," *Official Journal of the European Union* L 328 (2008): 55–58, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:328:0055:0058:en:PDF>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. "Council Conclusions on Combating Hate Crime in the European Union," Council of the European Union, issued December 5–6, 2013, accessed May 23, 2020, [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/139949.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/139949.pdf).

At the same time, in December 2013, the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) dropped its working definition for antisemitism which was authored in 2005 by its preceding agency, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). A spokesperson at that time did not consider it to be a valid definition, and the agency declared that it was unable to define the term.<sup>7</sup>

These examples not only showcase the reluctance with which the EU has approached this topic but point to a much more serious problem: the reluctance of the political establishment to come to grips with the ideological foundations of antisemitism and to deal with its major proponents today.

In recent years more positive developments have taken place. The EU Commission's formation of a High-Level Group on combating Racism, Xenophobia and other forms of Intolerance and the appointment of Katharina von Schnurbein as coordinator for combating antisemitism in 2015 have raised expectations that the EU is finally getting more serious in its efforts to fight antisemitism. Nonetheless, it must be noted that simultaneous with Schnurbein's appointment, a coordinator for anti-Muslim hatred was installed as well. These appointments were announced at the EU's first annual colloquium on Fundamental Rights which was held under the theme: "Tolerance and Respect: Preventing and Combating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim Hatred in Europe," a title that appears to equate antisemitic ideology with anti-Muslim racism.<sup>8</sup> In May of 2017, the EU Commission, together with other institutions, organized a "Joint Day of Action against Antisemitism, anti-Muslim Hatred and Discrimination"<sup>9</sup> which further suggests that one cannot speak about antisemitism other than in the context of anti-Muslim racism within EU institutions. Such generalizations fail to understand the nature of antisemitism and run counter to efforts to combat it. They are the result of a political climate, promoted by major parts of the anti-racist Left and Islamist organizations that have successfully produced a narrative where antisemitic resentments have been displaced by so-called "Islamopho-

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7 Cf. "EU Drops its 'Working Definition' of anti-Semitism," *The Times of Israel*, December 5, 2013, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/eu-drops-its-working-definition-of-anti-semitism/>.

8 "Commission Appoints Coordinators on Antisemitism and anti-Muslim Hatred," European Commission, issued December 1, 2015, accessed May 23, 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-is-new/news/news/2015/20151201\\_2\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-is-new/news/news/2015/20151201_2_en).

9 "OSCE/ODIHR and EU Institutions Hold Joint Day of Action against Anti-Semitism and Anti-Muslim Hatred and Discrimination," Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, issued May 31, 2017, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/320471>.

bia.” The goal of such sentiment is to trivialize the emergence of the “New Antisemitism” and relegate it to the Far Right’s antisemitism.<sup>10</sup>

Schnurbein herself has stated that antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred are very different in origins, history, and manifestations. Her priorities as antisemitism coordinator are—in line with the EU commission—tackling online hate speech, Holocaust denial, and education.<sup>11</sup> While these are certainly important issues to address, the EU seems to refrain from pointing to the main sources of antisemitism today. Neither Muslim nor the “New Antisemitism” of the Left are highlighted in the EU commission’s agenda.<sup>12</sup>

A major step in creating a framework for the fight against antisemitism was taken in June 2017 when the European parliament passed the “Motion for Resolution on Combating Antisemitism” by an overwhelming majority. Evidently, the European United Left–Nordic Green Left was the only party voting against the motion. The resolution calls on the EU institutions and the member states to adopt and apply the working definition of antisemitism employed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and to appoint national coordinators on combating antisemitism.<sup>13</sup>

The adoption of a working definition—which is the very same definition that was first introduced by the EUMC, then rejected—marks an important step forward in the EU’s ability to counter antisemitism but due to its legally non-binding status constitutes a half-hearted measure. As of March 2020, seventeen EU countries have adopted the working definition,<sup>14</sup> one of them being Austria which adopted the IHRA definition even prior to the EU’s parliament resolution at the request of then Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz. However, as if to illustrate that such measures are by no means sufficient in the fight against antisemitism, Kurz also—as a candidate during Austria’s 2017 election campaign, raised anti-

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**10** Cf. L. H. Kahlweiß and S. Salzborn, “‘Islamophobie’ als politischer Kampfbegriff: Zur konzeptionellen und empirischen Kritik des Islamophobiebegriffes,” in *Jahrbuch für Extremismus- und Terrorismusforschung 2011/2012 (II)*, ed. A. Pfahl-Traughber (Brühl: Hochschule des Bundes für öffentliche Verwaltung, 2014), 248–63.

**11** Cf. K. von Schnurbein, “Q&A: EU Anti-Semitism Envoy Katharina von Schnurbein,” interview by T. Siurkus, *Moment Magazine*, January 27, 2016, <https://momentmag.com/22574-2/>.

**12** Cf. “Combating Antisemitism,” European Commission, accessed May 23, 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item\\_id=50144](https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item_id=50144).

**13** Cf. “Motion for Resolution on Combating Antisemitism,” European Parliament, issued May 29, 2017, accessed May 23, 2020, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-8-2017-0388\\_EN.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-8-2017-0388_EN.html).

**14** Cf. “Adoption of the Working Definition,” American Jewish Committee, accessed May 23, 2020, <https://www.ajc.org/adoption-of-the-working-definition>.

semitic undertones calling to rid Austria of the “the Silbersteins”<sup>15</sup> and subsequently formed a coalition with the FPÖ, a party that is deeply rooted in the antisemitic tradition.

In sum, the above-mentioned developments must be considered first steps in the EU’s ambitions to counter antisemitism but lack sufficient substance and reach to do so in a comprehensive manner that acknowledges the urgency and seriousness of the issue.

## Challenges to the Fight against Antisemitism

There are yet additional challenges that need to be considered:

(1) The fight against antisemitism requires a demonstration of credibility and integrity in order to meet its overarching objective. Yet, the EU still actively pursues policies that run counter to its own agenda in the struggle against antisemitism and turns a blind eye to the issue whenever politically suitable. Such as in 2016 when Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas remarked in an address to the European Union—during which he received standing ovations by hundreds of EU officials—that “a number of rabbis in Israel announced, and made a clear announcement, demanding that their government poison the water to kill the Palestinians.”<sup>16</sup> Despite this claim that recalls medieval antisemitic libels, then President of the EU parliament, Martin Schulz, called his speech inspiring.<sup>17</sup> It is just one of many examples when antisemitism received a pass from the EU and its dignitaries.

Moreover, in the realm of foreign policy, the EU has been particularly soft on those regimes that promote antisemitism, such as Iran which is one of the main advocates of Holocaust denial and a main sponsor of antisemitic terrorism. Just a few weeks before the commencement of the conference “An End to Antisemitism!”, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, Chairman of the Committee for Foreign Policy of

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15 N. Weißensteiner, “Causa Silberstein: Wodak warnt vor ‘Spiel mit jüdischen Namen,’” *Der Standard*, October 10, 2017, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000065749579/causa-silberstein-expertin-wodak-warnt-vor-gefaehrlichem-spiel-mit-juedischen>.

16 R. Emmott and D. Williams, “Abbas Says some Israeli Rabbis Called for Poisoning Palestinian Water,” *Reuters*, June 23, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-israel/abbas-says-some-israeli-rabbis-called-for-poisoning-palestinian-water-idUSKCN0Z91J8>.

17 Cf. Martin Schulz (@EP\_PresSchulz), “Inspiring address by Pres. #Abbas to #EPlenary – #EU supports aspiration by large majority of #Palestinians for peace and reconciliation,” Twitter, June 23, 2016, [https://twitter.com/ep\\_pressschulz/status/745932784775102464?lang=de](https://twitter.com/ep_pressschulz/status/745932784775102464?lang=de).

the Iranian pseudo-parliament, was received by the EU parliament.<sup>18</sup> Boroujerdi is not only responsible for the support of terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and Hamas but participated in a 2014 Tehran conference that hosted Holocaust deniers and antisemitic conspiracists.

In recent years, the EU has also become a benefactor of the antisemitic BDS movement. According to NGO Monitor, almost a third of the EU grants administered through EU regional funding programs designated for Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza are received by organizations that actively promote BDS. Out of a total of 67 million euros, these groups have received almost 17 million.<sup>19</sup>

EU funds are also distributed to extremist Muslim organizations that promote antisemitism—as part of programs against radicalization (sic!). Recently it was discovered that more than 200,000 euros will be paid to the Islamic Union of Shia Communities in Germany that is closely aligned with the Islamic Center Hamburg, an outpost of the Iranian regime that has declared its aim to focus on the fight against the “Zionist enemy.”<sup>20</sup>

Against this backdrop the question arises: how does the EU plan to lead a credible fight against antisemitism if its very own institutions and officials, by not explicitly condemning and acting on antisemitic expressions contribute to their public acceptance.

(2) In the current political climate—particularly with the rise of the Far Right and the influence of anti-Zionist stakeholders such as, until recently, Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party in the UK—it has become even more challenging to carry out comprehensive measures in the fight against antisemitism. Whether here in Austria where the Freedom Party, a party with an extensive antisemitic tradition, has become part of the government or elsewhere on the European continent where former fringe parties are on the rise.

These developments challenge efforts to make a serious case in the fight against every aspect of antisemitism as these political camps exclusively focus on specific expressions of antisemitism and refuse to reflect on their own contributions to this ever-growing threat.

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**18** Cf. “EU Lawmakers Grill Visiting Iranian Delegation on Holocaust Denial, Terror Links,” *The Times of Israel*, January 24, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/eu-lawmakers-grill-visiting-iranian-delegation-about-holocaust-denial-terrorism/>.

**19** Cf. “EU Funding to NGOs Active in Anti-Israel BDS Campaigns,” NGO Monitor, issued January 23, 2017, accessed May 23, 2020, <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/reports/eu-funding-ngos-active-anti-israel-bds-campaigns/>.

**20** “EU-Geld unterstützt Iran-nahen IGS-Verein,” *FOCUS Online*, January 27, 2018, [https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/schiitischer-dachverband-eu-geld-untersuetzt-iran-nahen-igs-ver-ein-der-gilt-als-extremistisch-beeinflusst\\_id\\_8372882.html](https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/schiitischer-dachverband-eu-geld-untersuetzt-iran-nahen-igs-ver-ein-der-gilt-als-extremistisch-beeinflusst_id_8372882.html).

(3) Bias against Israel dominates the public discourse. The “New Antisemitism” has found its way into academia and the mainstream media. Anti-Zionism, the demonization and delegitimization of Israel, has become the predominant expression of contemporary antisemitism while anti-Israel resentments have become commonplace.<sup>21</sup> The EU and its member states have contributed to this climate not only by singling out Israel repeatedly but by actively supporting measures directed against the Jewish state such as backing anti-Israel resolutions at multilateral organizations like the UN or by introducing discriminatory measures such as the labeling of products from Israeli settlements. These actions tend to reaffirm widespread antisemitic attitudes.

(4) A primary challenge in the contemporary struggle against antisemitism is the ongoing Islamization among Muslim communities that goes hand in hand with antisemitic acts, as evidenced by the multiple terror attacks carried out by Jihadists in Europe. According to several surveys, antisemitic attitudes among (especially young) Muslims are by far greater than among the overall population.<sup>22</sup> A significant percentage of antisemitic attacks—which have been surging in Europe in the past decades—are carried out by perpetrators with a Muslim background. Across European capitals Jews are harassed frequently by Muslim youth. The term “Jew” has become a swear word in German schools with a high percentage of Muslim students.<sup>23</sup> These developments require serious countermeasures which are undermined, however, as certain forms become socially acceptable.

## Strategic Paradigm Confronting Antisemitism

Taking these challenges into account, it is imperative to address the fight against antisemitism not through isolated, cosmetic steps but as a major societal effort that tackles antisemitism in all its expressions.

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**21** Cf. R. S. Wistrich, ed., *Anti-Judaism, Antisemitism, and Delegitimizing Israel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2016).

**22** Cf. “The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other,” Pew Global Attitudes Project, issued June 22, 2006, accessed May 23, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2006/06/22/the-great-divide-how-westerners-and-muslims-view-each-other/>; and G. Jikeli, “Antisemitismus unter Muslimen in Europa,” Lecture at the Gemeindezentrum IKG, Vienna, June 10, 2013, <http://iibsa.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Jikeli-Vortrag-10.-Juni-2013-Wien.pdf>.

**23** Cf. R. Werner, “‘Jude’ ist an Berliner Schulen wieder ein Schimpfwort,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, September 2, 2012, <http://www.morgenpost.de/berlin-aktuell/article108921681/Jude-ist-an-Berliner-Schulen-wieder-ein-Schimpfwort.html>.

As such, I introduce the major strategic imperatives in fighting antisemitism: Prevention, Containment, and Deterrence. These strategic concepts ostensibly contradict one another as applied to statecraft and warfare wherein a nation usually chooses only one path forward in dealing with its adversaries.

In the context of the subject at hand, however, they refer to measures that can either deter or contain actors from committing antisemitic acts through fear of coercive means such as legal punishment or public retribution—and to prevent individuals from joining the antisemitic bandwagon through measures taken by society as a whole.

Below are measures that the EU and its member states should carry out that incorporate these strategic imperatives in the fight against antisemitism:

### **Prevention: Political Islam and Antisemitism Must be Confronted through the Empowerment of Secular Muslims.**

Due to the influx of refugees from Arab and Muslim countries that have a long history of disseminating antisemitic propaganda and conspiracy theories, more programs must be established to counter antisemitism and political Islam within immigrant communities. Such programs need to be led by secular and moderate activists within these communities in order to undermine conservative and radical forces. Governments and civil society should not only encourage and support their efforts in combatting radicalization and antisemitism within Muslim communities but also help raise their profile across society. These figures represent important role models who can embolden other Muslims to follow their lead.

### **Containment: A European-wide Cordon Sanitaire vis-à-vis all Antisemitic Forces Must be Agreed to and Implemented.**

Such an agreement would prohibit governments and political parties, civil society, the media, and influential companies in Europe from seeking partnerships and cooperation with organizations and individuals involved in promoting and spreading antisemitism. Policymakers need to refrain from seeking short-term alliances with parties that base their political program or propaganda on antisemitic tropes and instead use the full extent of the law to discourage them from taking part in the political process. Furthermore, public institutions like those of the EU need to put an end to providing support to antisemitic organizations, such as the BDS movement.



Europe must also establish a foreign policy in line with the fight against antisemitism and apply high standards when dealing with foreign regimes and parties who spread antisemitic sentiments such as Turkey or those that threaten the Jewish state with annihilation such as Iran. Diplomatic, political, and economic measures such as sanctions must be taken to delineate a clear stance against antisemitism and anti-Zionism.

The EU and its member states need to convey to their constituencies that antisemitism in all its forms has no place in European societies and denounce all antisemitic expressions and incidents. Efforts to equate antisemitism with “Islamophobia” or other forms of racism need to be countered. Antisemitism is a distinct ideology and needs to be treated as such.

### **Deterrence: The Law Must Be Enforced Consistently and the Legal Framework on Hate Crimes and those Spreading Hate Speech Needs to be Expanded.**

Many European countries have existing legislation in place that targets certain aspects of incitement and hate crimes. This legislation must be enforced and, where appropriate, adjusted. Policies and legal provisions need to be implemented that, while keeping in line with legislation protecting free speech, ban antisemitism from the public sphere, on or offline. Entities that promote antisemitism, deny the Holocaust and/or call for violence need to be prohibited, and enforcement steps need to be taken against all organizations that perpetrate such acts, whether they be NGOs or Muslim organizations that are linked to states that seek to incite antisemitism or Jihadist terrorist organizations, such as Hezbollah.

It is troubling that contemporary antisemitism has been ignored, belittled, and made use of politically for so long. This makes it all the more important—as uncomfortable as it may be for political leaders in Europe to do so—to ramp up the war against antisemitism and to implement the measures proposed as soon as possible. The struggle against antisemitism in Europe will determine the capacity of the continent to stand up in defense of the freedoms carved out in the Enlightenment and fought over in the French revolution.

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