Relation

RESEARCH, KNOWLEDGE & EDUCATION AGAINST ANTISEMITISM

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SHADOW MONITORING OF ILLEGAL ANTISEMITIC HATE SPEECH

April 20th – 21st, 2023

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The EU-Funded RELATION – RESEARCH, KNOWLEDGE & EDUCATION AGAINST ANTISEMITISM project (https://www.relationproject.eu) aims at defining an innovative strategy that starts from a better knowledge of the Jewish history/traditions as part of the common history/traditions, and puts in place a set of educational activities in Belgium, Italy, Romania and Spain as well as online actions in order to tackle the phenomenon.

The project activities include the monitoring of antisemitism phenomenon online in the four countries of the project (Belgium, Italy, Romania and Spain) by creating a cross-country web-monitoring of illegal antisemitic hate speech.

The monitoring exercises aim at:

- Analyzing the removal rate of illegal antisemitic hate speech available on diverse Social Media Platforms, namely Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and TikTok.
- Partners organizations focused on their country language: French in Belgium, Italian, Romanian and Spanish;
- Analyzing the types of content and narratives collected by the research team.

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Four organizations from four different countries (Belgium, Italy, Spain and Romania) took part in the monitoring exercise. Comunitat Jueva Bet Shalom De Catalunya (Bet Shalom, Spain), CEJI - A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe (Belgium), Fondazione Centro Di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (CDEC, Italy), Intercultural Institute Timișoara (IIT, Romania).

The monitoring exercise follows the definition of Illegal hate speech as defined "by the Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law and national laws transposing it, means all conduct publicly inciting to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin."

The content was collected and reported to social media platforms between April 21st and 22nd, 2023. Content was checked for removal on April 26th to give enough time to social media platforms to analyze and remove the content.[1] The monitoring exercises devote particular attention to the intersection of antisemitism and sexism.

KEY FIGURES

1. Notifications of illegal hate speech

- A total of 161 pieces of content were submitted following the Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA definition of hate speech to the IT companies signatories to the Code of Conduct.
- Twitter and Facebook received the largest number of reports (42), while TikTok received 41, and YouTube 36. The content was collected and reported to social media platforms between April 21st and 22nd, 2023.

2. Removal Rate

From the 161 pieces of content reported to the Social Media Platforms only 25 (16%) have been removed by April 26th, 2023, a positive difference of 4% when compared with the first round of shadow monitoring, conducted in October 2022, when the percentage was 12%. The removal rate, which is well below that of the European Commission's 7th evaluation of the Code of Conduct (63.6%),[2] varies greatly among the four platforms and the four languages.
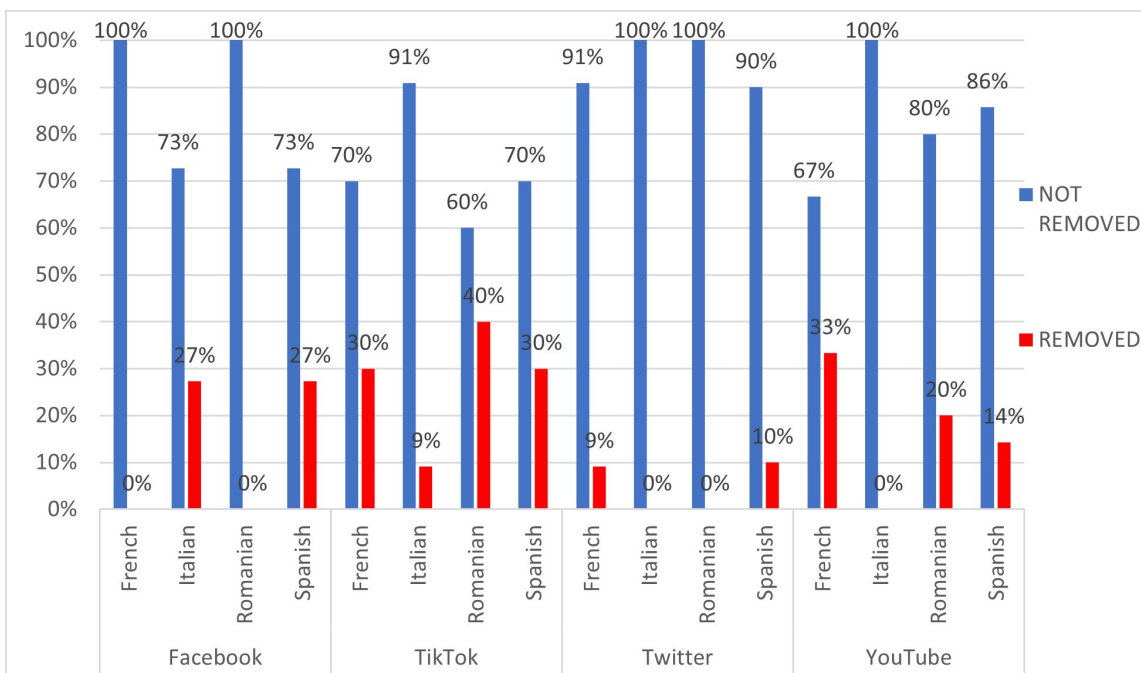
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[1] The EU Code of Conduct gives the platforms 24 hours to answer to reported content.
[2] https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/Factsheet%20-%207th%20monitoring%20round%20of%20the%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf

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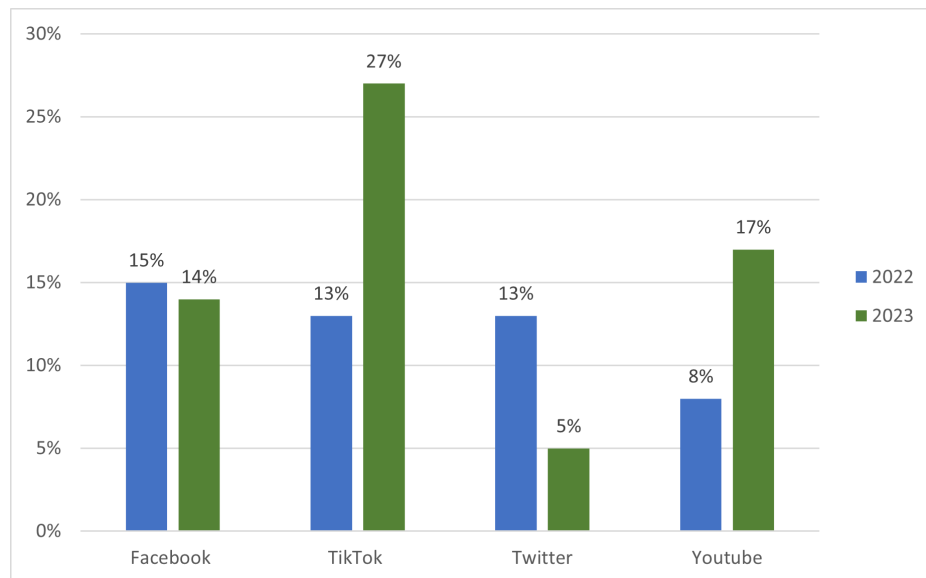RESEARCH, KNOWLEDGE & EDUCATION AGAINST ANTISEMITISM

	NOT REMOVED	REMOVED	% removed
Facebook	**36**	**6**	**14%**
French	10		0%
Italian	8	3	27%
Romanian	10		0%
Spanish	8	3	27%
TikTok	**30**	**11**	**27%**
French	7	3	30%
Italian	10	1	9%
Romanian	6	4	40%
Spanish	7	3	30%
Twitter	**40**	**2**	**5%**
French	10	1	9%
Italian	11		0%
Romanian	10		0%
Spanish	9	1	10%
YouTube	**30**	**6**	**17%**
French	6	3	33%
Italian	10		0%
Romanian	8	2	20%
Spanish	6	1	14%
Total	**136**	**25**	**16%**

While the overall removal rate has not changed drastically, some variation regarding social media platforms and language was measured.

As it can be noticed in the graph above, no content was removed in French on Facebook, in Italian on Twitter and YouTube, and in Romanian on Facebook and Twitter. The highest removal rate overall was seen on TikTok (27%) and the lowest on Twitter (5%). Taking into consideration both the platform and language, the highest removal rate was seen on TikTok content in Romanian (40%), followed by YouTube content in French (33%) and TikTok content in French and Spanish (30%).

When comparing the first (October 2022) and the second round (April 2023) of shadow monitoring, no great change has been measured in the overall removal rate (from 12% in October 2022 to 16% in April 2023). By comparing the removal rate by round of monitoring and platform we are able to see that TikTok and YouTube removed more content in 2023 compared to 2022: TikTok increased its removal rate by 14% and YouTube by 9%; while Facebook experienced a decrease of 1% and Twitter of 8%.[3]

The language with the highest removal rate was Spanish (21%) followed by French (18%) and Romanian 15%. The lowest removal rate was that of Italian content (9%), which in 2022 was the highest (21%).

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[3] Twitter had ownership and policies change between the first and the second round of shadow monitoring.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

In this section, we are going to analyze the content reported and removed. It allows us to look for similarities and differences in the antisemitic rhetoric employed by social media users in different platforms and languages.

Content employing the "Jewish power" trope[4] was found in all the four languages analyzed, as in the first round of the shadow monitoring. This rhetoric is often connected with conspiracy thinking which assigns extraordinary power to Jews and Zionists (as a synonym of Jews). Jews are depicted as a conspiring group that aims to control, subvert or destroy the world, society or the country they are located, and single Jews are seen as representatives of the whole community.

A Romanian user claimed that "the Jews want to eliminate the Romanian people, in order to occupy Romania" (not removed), another posted "Who the hell ran this country until now? The traitorous Jews. Get out ordinary mother*ckers! Jews were the ones who prepared and set up the earthquake in Turkey and we should be vigilant that something like that does not happen in Romania" (not removed). A Spanish speaking user claimed that "All your elected representatives serve the same master" with a picture depicting several politicians praying at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem while wearing a Kippah (not removed). In several tweets it was suggested that Jews control the Belgium Party *Mouvement Réformateur* (Reformist Movement), which is part of the current Belgium government. Finally, an Italian user claimed that "You lecture us because the Germans took the wealth away from the Jews, today as yesterday the Jews steal your savings and life, and you live in complete silence. Bravo, F*ck" (removed), another that "Some may call it communism, but I call it what it is: Judaism!' Rabbi Stephen Wise. Transgender madness. Men in sports and women's bathrooms. Endless warfare. Migration. False pandemics. Deadly vaccines. The West is absolutely communist. Because Kabbalah is Satanic" (not removed).

Several posts condoned or incited violence against Jews, some of them in connection with the Shoah. Some of the comments found in Italian are: "let's set them on fire again" (not removed), "I've always said that 6 million is not enough", "all because they didn't let the Austrian painter[5] finish the job" (not removed), "#TooFew" in reference to the people dead in the Shoah, and "I will order some pure Ashkenazi[6] meat to feed to my goyim[7] dogs" (not removed).

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[4] See: https://antisemitism.adl.org/power/

[5] "Austrian painter" is used as a code for Hitler, specially on social media.

[6] "Member of the diasporic Jewish population that settled in central and eastern Europe, distinguished from the Sephardim chiefly by liturgy, religious customs, and pronunciation of Hebrew." Source: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/ashkenazi

[7] Non-Jews.

Spanish speaking users also condoned violence: a Facebook user posted "Why hit a punching bag if there is such a thing as a Jew?" (not removed), another posted the following in reference to a Jewish politician "Jewish rat, you got tired of stealing and you are still in the same, I hope they kick the shit out of you, just as you wash your hands at this moment .... you always did it in your government, pro Zionist rat" (removed), hashtags like #killthejews and #deathtothejews were found on TikTok, and finally, a Spanish user published the following tweet "The only thing that Hitler did well: Killing Zionists as they are rats" and "Sure, Hitler did not do well: there are still Zionists left to kill" (not removed).

Holocaust denial and distortion is also found in our dataset. A Romanian user claimed that "the only holocaust in Romania was in December 89[8]…" (not removed), another that "after 76/80 years they are still being talked about [Shoah victims], that's enough. A people without God considering that they killed their son.[9] They have long been allied with satan" (not removed), a French speaking user claimed that the Shoah is Jewish propaganda, and another that the Holocaust and the *Quenelle* gesture[10] were invented by Jews. Some Italian TikTok users questioned the number of victims "How do you destabilize governments? What about the banks? 6 million seems a bit too much to me" (not removed). Another user affirmed that the "guy with the mustache [Hitler] who persecuted them had it all figured out well in advance...." to what another replied "yeah... he didn't get the job done in time..." (not removed). Users figured out that in order not to be blocked or have their posts/comments removed they have to use coded words "them," the "Austrian painter," "the mustache guy," and so on.

Israel and Zionists/Zionism are associated by some users to Nazism using words such as "nazionists",[11] "Judeo-nazism" and so on. An Italian user claimed that "Israel is the 'only country in the world that has tripled in warfare in less than 50 years, that practices political murder, that interferes in the sovereignty of other states (see when Haider and Le Pen won elections in their

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[8] Romanian revolution that led to the end of the Communist rule of the country and the execution of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR)'s General Secretary Nicolae Ceaușescu.

[9] "The myth that Jews collectively murdered Jesus, also referred to as "deicide," has been used to justify violence against Jews for centuries. Historians as well as Christian leaders have agreed that the claim is baseless." See: https://antisemitism.adl.org/deicide/

[10] "The gesture involves touching or gripping your shoulder with one hand while holding the palm of your other hand outstretched and pointing to the ground. Some describe it as a combination of the *bras d'honneur* with a bent arm (which means "up yours") and the Nazi salute." See: https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-25550581

[11] Blend of nazi and and Zionist.

countries), that still hides behind its 'holocaust' and forgets what it is doing to the Palestinians... And what do I need to hear? 'Example of freedom, democracy, human values'?! But f*ck you Jews and those who did not annihilate you as it would be right to do!!!!" (removes).

CONCLUSION

The removal rate of antisemitic content in our study (16%) is in sharp contrast to that of the latest evaluation of the Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online (63%) coordinated by the European Commission. However, there are some differences between our study and the EC one: only four organizations took part in this exercise, compared to 36 in the EC one; our monitoring lasted two days, while EC's lasts one month; we only reported antisemitic content with regular user profiles, the EC research includes other forms of discrimination and some organizations reported content through their "trusted flagger" accounts. It is also important to observe the difference between the timing and differences in the number of content reported, the organizations taking part in this monitoring exercise were able to collect and report 161 cases compared to the 3634 notifications submitted to the IT companies during the 7th monitoring round coordinated by the European Commission.

The qualitative analysis of the content, as seen above, allowed us to explore antisemitic content available on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok on its hues and language, country and platform differences. Social media platforms signatories to the EU Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online agreed to remove a great number of posts in violation of the 2008 Framework Decisions, national laws, and their own hate speech policies. This study clarifies that more effort and an implementation of the removal process is needed to create a safer environment for social media users.

Looking at the results, we need to highlight not only the possibility of secondary victimization, but also the need for a thorough review of policies in the Social Media Platform to avoid the spread and incentivization of hate speech.

Antisemitism on social media is becoming ever more sophisticated, with the increasing usage of mixed media by users (text + image, for example) and the use of coded language. Users figured out that in order not to be blocked or have their posts/comments removed they have to use coded words "them," the "Austrian painter," "the mustache guy," and so on. Thus, we believe that companies should improve their monitoring tools, employ human moderation to a greater extent, in order to be able to recognize antisemitism in all its country-language specific variations, and work with CSOs that have experience in this field. Furthermore, careful consideration should be given to removal of antisemitic content on platforms heavily used by teenagers and young adults, such as TikTok and YouTube, in order to safeguard them as much as

possible of the effects of online hate speech and the assimilation of harmful antisemitic tropes and stereotypes.

The organizations participating in the seventh monitoring exercise are the following:

Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (CDEC) - www.cdec.it; CEJI - A Jewish contribution to an inclusive Europe - www.ceji.org; Intercultural Institute Timisoara (IIT) - www.intercultural.ro; Comunitat Jueva Bet Shalom de Catalunya - www.betshalom.cat

"**RELATION**" is a project **funded by the European Union** (Citizen, Equality, Rights and Values Program - CERV) that aims at defining an innovative strategy against Modern Antisemitism, starting from a better knowledge of the Jewish history and traditions as part of the common European history/traditions. This is a two-year project that puts in place a set of educational activities in Italy, Spain, Romania and Belgium as well as online actions in order to tackle this phenomenon.

Modern Antisemitism appears in different forms, and it is not always easy to unmask. The number of antisemitic incidents in EU Member States has risen significantly, also in the countries involved in the project where there is evidence of high level of prejudice and misinformation about Jews, forms of antisemitism and intolerance, increasingly exploited by hate speeches online, particularly exacerbated since the 1st COVID lockdown.

Project partners:

Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (CDEC) - www.cdec.it; CEJI - A Jewish contribution to an inclusive Europe - www.ceji.org; Intercultural Institute Timisoara (IIT) - www.intercultural.ro; Comunitat Jueva Bet Shalom de Catalunya - www.betshalom.cat; Fondazione Hallgarten-Franchetti Centro Studi Villa Montesca (FCSVM) - www.montesca.eu; University of Milan (UNIMI) - www.unimi.it; Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore - www.unicatt.it