



OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the
European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions
EU Strategy on Combatting Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life (2021-2030)
[COM(2021) 615 final]

SOC/704

Rapporteur: **Ákos Topolánszky**

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1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 The EESC strongly defends and emphasises the fundamental values that underpin the European Union and European coexistence. In its view, any phenomenon of antisemitism is incompatible with European values and norms, as it leads to violations of the law and to exclusion, which is a threat not only to the communities concerned and Jewish life, but also to Europe's heritage and present, and to a democratic European future that can only be achieved in a diverse society.
- 1.2 The EESC therefore broadly supports the establishment of the Strategy¹ and the fact that it was preceded by a broad consultation process in 2021. It also agrees in all respects with the need not only to combat antisemitism, but also to work towards public policies and community cooperation promoting mutual acceptance.
- 1.3 It strongly supports that the Strategy is not only about combating antisemitism, but also about fostering Jewish life. Jewish communities and individuals are not just passive victims of the past and present, but also active participants in Europe. The EESC strongly supports the Strategy's vision of a European future in which Jewish communities thrive and develop. The EESC firmly believes that antisemitism is not only a violation of the law affecting European Jews, but is also a test of the European idea, European coexistence, the rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy.
- 1.4 The EESC endorses the working definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)² and strongly encourages all Member States to adopt it and make it the basis of their policy action.
- 1.5 It proposes that this topic be placed on the agenda of one of its priority work organisations each year and, if necessary, that the implementation of the strategy be evaluated by other means (country visit, research, etc.).
- 1.6 The EESC supports the inclusion of education as one of the priorities of the Strategy, as it plays a key role in combating and preventing antisemitism. Education and training materials on relevant issues (including ethnic intolerance, racism, hate crimes and prejudice) should be developed in cooperation with civil professional and Jewish representative bodies.
- 1.7 In the media, all constitutional and EU legal instruments should be consistently used to tackle antisemitic content, while improving knowledge and understanding of Jewish life in more balanced and sensitive reporting.
- 1.8 The EESC proposes that the Commission consider how to safeguard the right of Jewish communities to continue their beliefs and rituals when formulating future policies, as a means of fostering Jewish life in Europe.

¹ Commission Communication (2021) 615 final; EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life.

² "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities." <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>.

- 1.9 In the EESC's view, Jewish culture, as an integral part of European identity, must be brought much closer to citizens and the general public and made more accessible. This is also a great opportunity for mutual and communal understanding, which is key to the development of both the European idea and of the Jewish people and the strengthening of their communities.
- 1.10 A clear and strong legislative framework that systematically addresses the issue of hate speech and related phenomena is a necessary and binding part of the European legal order, but is not a sufficient response in itself. The legislative framework should be complemented with educational tools and a system of community-society programmes that are widely used and capable of reaching citizens.
- 1.11 The rise of populism globally highlights the need to also look at the wider social context of antisemitism. One type of hatred cannot be treated without awareness of and effective action against others.
- 1.12 All Member States have a fundamental obligation to ensure that their citizens have the freedom to hold religious beliefs and practise their religions without fear. Intimidation by any means or to any extent targeting religions in general, and in particular Jewish religious beliefs, should be seen as a violation of the democratic legal order.
- 1.13 The EESC encourages the European Commission to give the fight against antisemitism and the strategic agenda for the promotion of Jewish life a strong foreign policy dimension in all aspects of the cooperation with third countries and international organisations.
- 1.14 In order to implement the Strategy even more effectively, the Committee recommends the formation of a permanent unit at Council level as well to monitor and combat antisemitism.
- 1.15 The EESC firmly believes that strong recommendations and guidelines are also needed in sport, and football in particular, as the sector, because of its popularity and visibility, poses a serious risk of antisemitism but can also be an essential tool for effectively combating this phenomenon.

2. **General comments**

- 2.1 The EESC strongly defends and emphasises the fundamental values that underpin the European Union and European coexistence. These values include respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities³. In the Committee's view, any phenomenon of antisemitism is incompatible with European values and norms, as it leads to violations of the law and to exclusion, which is a threat not only to the communities concerned and Jewish life, but also to Europe's heritage and present, and to a democratic European future that can only be achieved in a diverse society.

³ Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12012M/TXT&from=EN>.

- 2.2 However, it is important to note that the Strategy is not only about combating antisemitism, but also about fostering Jewish life. It is certainly positive that the Strategy addresses the fact that Jewish communities and individuals are not just passive victims of the past and present, but are active participants in Europe, making a significant contribution to a diverse and inclusive Europe. The EESC strongly supports the Strategy's vision of a European future in which Jewish communities thrive and develop.
- 2.3 The EESC therefore broadly supports the establishment of the Strategy⁴ and the fact that it was preceded by a broad consultation process in 2021. It also agrees in all respects with the need not only to combat antisemitism, but also to work towards public policies and community cooperation promoting mutual acceptance. The Committee also feels itself obliged to support all efforts to ensure that the European citizens of Jewish background feel comfortable and safe, are welcomed everywhere in Europe and will have a positive future perspective in the European Union.
- 2.4 The EESC firmly believes that antisemitism is not only a violation of the law affecting European Jews, but is also a test of the European idea, European coexistence, the rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy. Accordingly, it affects everyone and all political and social organisations with responsibilities, and is a litmus test for promoting the European way of life and protecting the citizens and values of the Union.
- 2.5 The EESC agrees that the EU institutions and the Member States need to adopt a strategy based on a common approach, but that this alone is not sufficient. The commitments stemming from the values set out in the strategies must be translated into measurable and verifiable action and recognised as a self-evident reality of European coexistence.
- 2.6 Recommendations from independent and evidence-based research, as well as research based on community surveys, are essential for the development and implementation of national strategies and their action plans, as well as for their monitoring and evaluation, as is the case for the 2018 European Council Declaration⁵ on the fight against antisemitism and the 2020 European Council Declaration on mainstreaming the fight against antisemitism across policy areas⁶.
- 2.7 The EESC recommends that the Networks Overcoming Antisemitism (NOA) project, which is supported by the European Commission and uses objective questions and indicators based on international and EU standards⁷ to assess the steps taken by individual Member States to combat antisemitism, be widely applied in all Member States, so as to help them to implement and develop their policies effectively.

⁴ Commission Communication (2021) 615 final; EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life.

⁵ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15213-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁶ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47065/st13637-en20.pdf>.

⁷ <https://www.noa-project.eu/report-cards/> The methodology assesses each Member State's actions in ten areas, which are also represented by the Strategy: education, hate crime, hate speech, media, Holocaust remembrance, sport, interfaith dialogue, religious freedom, culture and heritage, and security. The standards are almost all based on international norms, directives, recommendations or guidelines approved by EU institutions or other international organisations (such as the OSCE or UNESCO).

- 2.8 The EESC has adopted and applies the working definition of antisemitism used by the IHRA. At the same time, it strongly advocates that it be adopted by all Member States and applied in their policy actions on the functioning of state and local government bodies in this area.
- 2.9 The EESC welcomes and considers exemplary the fact that the Strategy was developed through a broad consultation process⁸. It agrees that the principle of non-discrimination and the provisions and spirit of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union must be fully respected.
- 2.10 The EESC strongly supports the idea that each Member State should appoint a national coordinator or delegate as an essential part of its strategy, and should support their independent and free operation, involving all relevant stakeholders in society.
- 2.11 As the representative of organised civil society in the European Union, the EESC sees an urgent need for action – not just as a one-off campaign or a campaign against antisemitism, but as a permanent monitoring and awareness-raising task in the European Union. In doing so the Committee strongly recommends the formation of a permanent unit at Council level as well to monitor and combat antisemitism⁹. This would not only be an important visible symbol, it would also reinforce, on the part of the Member States, the meritorious work of the European Commission's Coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life and the European Parliament working group against antisemitism.
- 2.12 It proposes that this topic be placed on the agenda of one of its priority work organisations each year and, if necessary, that the implementation of the strategy be evaluated by other means (country visit, research, etc.).

3. **Education and youth policy**

- 3.1 The EESC supports the inclusion of education as one of the priorities of the Strategy, as it plays a key role in combating and preventing antisemitism. While legislation and enforcement of the law, including criminal law, certainly have a major role to play in tackling intergenerational hatred, long-term change in attitudes, public discourse and thinking can only be achieved through educational and community-based means.
- 3.2 The 2019 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) report¹⁰ clearly shows that antisemitic attacks very often target 18-34 year-olds, for many of whom this is an everyday reality. Jewish schools across Europe need protection. The EESC recommends that secondary school students, university students and young adults be given a prominent role in the implementation of the Strategy, through the involvement of youth leaders and student organisations, and through

⁸ For example, of the 76 points set out in the joint recommendation drafted by nine European Jewish organisations (B'nai B'rith International, CEJI, the World Jewish Congress (WJC), the European Jewish Congress (EJC), the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS), the European Union for Progressive Judaism (EUPJ), the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the European Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Jewish Culture and Heritage (AEPJ) and B'nai B'rith Europe), 58 have been included in the final text of the Strategy.

⁹ The EESC President's opening words at the debate on antisemitism in the context of SOC/704 on the EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, SOC section meeting, 10 February 2022.

¹⁰ Young Jewish Europeans: perceptions and experiences of antisemitism. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-young-jewish-europeans_en.pdf.

ongoing consultation and dialogue with them, including at local level. Their experience in the fields of hate speech, hate crime, social media and education is also of paramount importance, as they can be the primary victims, and sometimes main targets, of antisemitic attacks.

- 3.3 In the EESC's view, the Strategy should also include "co-created actions" in which all stakeholders are involved, including other minority groups and representatives from existing interfaith organisations, in order to bring about meaningful change.
- 3.4 Universities and academic communities can potentially be intellectual hotbeds of antisemitism. The Strategy should prioritise the involvement of university leaders in the fight against antisemitism, as set out in UNESCO's guidance, *Addressing antisemitism through education*¹¹, the implementation of which should certainly be made compulsory. This includes transparent mechanisms to follow up on expressions of antisemitism, such as appropriate procedures, incident reports and subsequent monitoring, including filtering out any antisemitic actions by university administrations.
- 3.5 In order to give teachers and academics in schools and universities a clear understanding of what antisemitism means, the training/educational opportunities mentioned in the Strategy should be made available to them in practice, and schools should be encouraged through educational organisation and funding to implement awareness-raising and knowledge development programmes on this topic, involving Jewish organisations, both civil and religious, in order to take action against the denial, distortion, fogging and trivialisation of the Holocaust, and to oppose efforts to glorify the Nazis and their collaborators. Similar programmes could form part of (integration) courses for immigrants. In the EESC's view, members of EU and national decision-making bodies should also be encouraged and expected to participate in training courses where their competence could develop in areas of concern to Jewish and other minorities.
- 3.6 For the future and the security of the Jewish community in Europe, the EESC recommends that Member States, through their competent ministries, examine the content and emphasis of national curricula and school curricula in terms of antisemitism and the recognition of Jewish values and identity, and develop educational and training materials and aids on relevant issues (including combating ethnic intolerance, racism, hate crime and prejudice) in cooperation with civil-professional and Jewish representative bodies.
- 3.7 The EESC recommends that the Commission develop accessible educational materials capable of reaching all the affected groups which define, in the language of education and for the benefit of minorities, including Jewish communities, what it means to be part of the European Union, based on the values of democracy and fundamental human rights, where diversity and anti-discrimination are self-evident and implicit values.
- 3.8 It recommends that secondary and higher education institutions make both their commitment to combating antisemitism and acceptance of Jewish values an explicit part of their anti-discrimination policy.

¹¹ <https://en.unesco.org/preventing-violent-extremism/education/antisemitism>.

3.9 The Committee recommends that Jewish youth organisations be given a prominent role in future public policies to promote Jewish life in all the identified areas of the Strategy, and decision-makers should also provide appropriate support for their activities.

4. **Media**

4.1 Decisive action based on shared values, and explicit support for the dissemination of positive content that recognises the dignity and rights of minorities, including those of Jewish origin, are needed in the normal workings of the media, including through social media campaigns, in order to curb antisemitic content.

4.2 The representation of Jewish communities and their members in traditional and social media is, in most cases, very limited, mainly focusing on the impact of antisemitic violence and terrorism and the collective memory of the Holocaust in Europe, the importance of which is, of course, beyond doubt. However, there is also a need to present positive content beyond this, such as contemporary Jewish performing arts, Jewish holidays or the promotion of Jewish languages as a recognition of the importance of social coexistence.

4.3 Beyond the cultural sphere, there are currently a number of Jewish community/civil society projects and initiatives taking place in parallel in the Member States of the European Union, working for a more inclusive and democratic Europe, reflecting the values and objectives of the EU. These initiatives are taking place in a number of areas, including the fight against racism, human rights, the environment and cultural diversity.

4.4 In the EESC's view, it would be desirable that, in addition to social media channels providing an opportunity to promote the traditional values and historical and religious expressions of Judaism, the majority of society should have an insight into the positive impact of Jewish community activism on society as a whole, which could also play an important role in combating stereotypes¹².

4.5 In training and informing journalists, there is a need to improve knowledge and understanding of Jewish life in the media in order to achieve more balanced and sensitive reporting.

4.6 All constitutional and EU legal instruments must be consistently used to curb antisemitic content in the media. To this end, systematic investigative activities should be carried out, involving the state media watchdog and monitoring organisations.

5. **Culture**

5.1 The EESC believes that Jewish culture, as an integral part of European identity, must be brought much closer to citizens and the general public and made more accessible. This is also a great opportunity for mutual and communal understanding, which is key to the development of both the European idea and of the Jewish people and the strengthening of their communities.

¹² Examples of such campaigns and projects include: <https://www.noa-project.eu/profiles/>.

- 5.2 The teaching of Jewish culture as a self-evident, integral and inseparable part of the European cultural spectrum is increasingly needed in schools, given that fewer people have daily contact with Jewish life after the Holocaust.
- 5.3 The EESC is convinced that cultural heritage must be recognised, respected and promoted not as a closed legacy of the past, but as a living and evolving reality. To this end, support must be given to strengthening local ownership and engagement by encouraging partnerships with stakeholders.
- 5.4 Although the Strategy refers to the Faro Convention¹³, it does not mention its practical application. There is a need to put into practice the framework and guidelines envisaged by the Faro Convention; namely, cooperation and development in the scientific, educational, cultural and artistic fields, including tourism.
- 5.5 The Committee calls on the EU institutions, the Member States, social partners and civil society organisations to properly present and celebrate the Jewish community's contribution to the EU as an integral and inalienable part of a common culture, for example drawing inspiration from the German initiative celebrating 1 700 years of Jewish life in Germany. It proposes supporting the European Days of Jewish Culture, involving the relevant institutions and civil society and encourages cooperation with the Council of Europe in implementing and expanding its European Cultural Routes programme.
- 5.6 Where no such initiative exists, national standards and guidelines should be established for preserving, maintaining and reinvigorating Jewish cultural heritage, while ensuring adequate funding. Jewish culture's presence in intercultural dialogue and its presentation should be promoted.
- 5.7 The EESC believes that integrated, long-term heritage protection strategies, based on the involvement of local communities and a multidisciplinary approach, need to be developed and financially supported. To this end, it is necessary to identify relevant stakeholders (local communities, municipalities, volunteers, activists, social partners and civil society organisations, Jewish religious communities, churches, regional and national institutions, public authorities), establish information, participation and consultation methods, identify opportunities for cooperation and partnerships, and systematically support these processes. The continued involvement of the European Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Jewish Culture and Heritage (AEPJ), the largest Jewish heritage protection organisation in Europe, is essential.

6. **Hate speech, hate crime, security**

- 6.1 A clear and strong legislative framework that systematically addresses the issue of hate speech and related phenomena, such as disinformation, is a necessary and binding part of the European legal order, but is not a sufficient response in itself. It should be complemented by educational tools and large-scale programmes that reach citizens and that, among other things, promote digital and information literacy, define the values of responsible citizenship and offer training to combat bias and disinformation in order to build a culture of mutual understanding.

¹³ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=199>.

- 6.2 The EESC believes that it is essential to understand the roots and causes of all forms of violence against Jewish individuals and communities in order to be able to take effective action not only through criminal justice, but also through a more effective system of action at community and societal level; this includes support for awareness-raising campaigns on non-discrimination, support for civil society organisations in providing training to target groups on recognising and responding to hate speech and hate crime, and support and funding for the monitoring, data collection and reporting activities of civil society organisations at national and international level.
- 6.3 In the EESC's view, not all citizens have the same responsibility in these areas; the responsibility of those whose activities have the greatest influence on social prejudices should be particularly stressed, with action being taken against these people where necessary, including prosecution in serious cases. These include political actors, those working for public and local administrations, and representatives of law enforcement agencies and judicial bodies. Violations that they commit should be prioritised and dealt with appropriately.
- 6.4 In-house training to raise awareness should be enhanced in these institutions, in particular in law enforcement agencies, and research should be regularly conducted to assess the internal situation in order to design policies to identify any prejudices among staff and improve the situation.
- 6.5 The EESC recommends that FRA carry out a more thorough analysis of the current security situation and of threats to Jewish life. At the same time, attempts at misinformation at Member State level that target the Jewish community and are based on false or wrong information, in particular about ritual acts, should be investigated and prevented through communication and public policy tools.
- 6.6 Institutionalised mechanisms for cooperation between law enforcement agencies and Jewish community organisations should be strengthened, and the requisite training should be provided to enable the police to accurately identify such offences and the fact that they were motivated by prejudices. In line with the EU Strategy on victims' rights (2020-2025)¹⁴, the capacity of the Jewish community and civil society organisations to provide victim support services should be supported. The uniform and comprehensive collection of more comparable data is needed at EU level.
- 6.7 The rise of populism globally highlights the need to also look at the wider social context of antisemitism as we fight against it: xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, racism and anti-Romani sentiments often go hand in hand with antisemitism, and one type of hatred cannot be treated without awareness of the others. They are different symptoms of the same social phenomenon, which cannot be interpreted and effectively dealt with independently of each other.
- 6.8 Jewish communities in Europe are facing increasing security needs with regard to schools, synagogues, community centres and synagogues. States should adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach in this matter by providing adequate measures and/or funding to address those challenges in order to ensure the safety of Jewish institutions and communal life.

¹⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0258>.

7. Freedom of religion and religious practice

- 7.1 All Member States have a fundamental obligation to ensure that their citizens have the freedom to hold religious beliefs and practise their religions without fear. Intimidation by any means or to any extent targeting religions in general, and in particular Jewish religious beliefs, should be seen as a violation of the democratic legal order.
- 7.2 Interreligious dialogue must use strategies based on values shared by the various religious organisations and must not be considered and implemented as a simple courtesy, and this approach should be supported through specific state tools.
- 7.3 Jewish communities want the growing legal uncertainty surrounding ritual slaughter (Shechita) and circumcision (Brit Mila) to be eliminated, and for this issue to be settled in a uniform manner by EU law. The EESC therefore recommends that these matters be discussed with Jewish communities and resolved by law in all cases, while recognising that they have been an integral part of active Jewish religious life in Europe for thousands of years.

8. International aspects

- 8.1 The EESC encourages the European Commission to give the fight against antisemitism and the strategic agenda for the promotion of Jewish life a strong foreign policy dimension in all aspects of the cooperation with third countries and international organisations.
- 8.2 *The EESC welcomes the consideration of the international aspects in the Commission's communication and highlights, in particular, the instruments of our neighbourhood policy and development cooperation, as well as the instruments for bringing EU candidate countries closer to the EU, as appropriate mechanisms for combating antisemitism and promoting Jewish life.*

9. Sport

- 9.1 The EESC firmly believes that strong recommendations and guidelines are also needed in sport, and football in particular, as the sector, because of its popularity and visibility, poses a serious risk of antisemitism but can also be an essential tool for effectively combating this phenomenon. In this regard, the Committee supports the guidelines set out in the FIFA Good Practice Guide on Diversity and Anti-Discrimination, which could also be an important reference for the Strategy.
- 9.2 It is important that sport federations and organisations establish their objectives for each issue on the basis of FIFA's recommendations (internal regulations, sanctions and monitoring of their implementation, education, networking and cooperation, communication and equal opportunities).
- 9.3 The EESC considers it important to develop and widely implement training and information programmes for supporters, clubs and associations as part of a clear commitment from them. Similar training could also be imposed as part of supporter sanctions, in addition to or independently of criminal sanctions.

- 9.4 The Committee calls for educational materials to be developed for the supporters' community to help them better understand the historical background to antisemitism in the stands, while helping to create a culture of inclusion¹⁵.
- 9.5 National federations and clubs should be encouraged, through sports tools, to develop their own educational publications and awareness-raising programmes in cooperation with relevant local organisations¹⁶.

Brussels, 23 March 2022

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¹⁵ For example <https://changingthechants.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Guidelines.ENGpdf.pdf>.

¹⁶ Good examples of this are Chelsea Football Club's guide: <https://www.efdn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CFC-CST-KIO-Antisemitism-Stewards-Guide-2018.pdf> and the Show Racism the Red Card initiative: <https://www.theredcard.org/>.