

The recent escalation of antisemitic attacks requires a Europe-wide response. Governments should join forces to prevent new waves of antisemitism by countering hate speech on the Internet and supporting education about the Holocaust and human rights.

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In November last year, Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić nominated me as the Council of Europe's first Special Representative to lead the fight against antisemitism and other forms of religious hatred. Only 6 months into the job, I was shocked by an outbreak of hatred against Jews expressed both online and on the streets of London and other European cities. Synagogues have been vandalised and Israeli flags burnt. The incidents present a heightened threat to Jewish life in Europe and Jewish citizens continue to fear for their security.

Decisive action is needed at to prevent further waves of violence and aggression on top of this rising tide of antisemitism. At the national level, some governments have taken various measures such as reinforcing police protection of Jewish communities. At the international level, governments should increase cooperation to tackle new waves of antisemitism which transcend national borders. Two key areas of action are combatting illegal hate speech on the internet and preventing antisemitism through education about the Holocaust and its remembrance.

Freedom of expression is one of the most important fundamental rights, protected by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. But this right is not unlimited, especially as regards Holocaust denial, racism and incitement to violence. Death threats, such as those posted on a massive scale against Jews in recent weeks, are particularly dangerous as they spread exponentially and can ultimately lead to violence and killing, such as the attack on the Synagogue in Halle, Germany, in 2019. Antisemitic hate speech on the Internet must be punished in the same way as physical crimes and internet platforms should remove illegal antisemitic and racist content both speedily and systematically.

This is clearly not yet the case, as demonstrated by an ongoing legal battle in France between the Union of Jewish Students (UEJF) and Twitter. UEJF complain that Twitter has failed to take down illegal content within 3-5 days of being notified by users. According to UEJF, only about 20% of manifestly antisemitic or racist posts were deleted in recent months.

UEJF also criticise Twitter for failing to be transparent over how, and with what human and digital resources, it moderates illegal content. A hearing on the case took place at the *Tribunal Judiciaire de Paris* this week and a decision is expected later this year.

Several governments are planning new or updated legislation to tackle illegal hate speech online. At the European Union level, the EU Commission's Digital Services Act proposes that Internet platforms take more responsibility for the content they disseminate. In parallel, the Council of Europe is preparing a comprehensive recommendation to its 47 governments on how to tackle hate speech from a human rights perspective. The guidance will build on the relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights and will pay special attention to the online environment.

The level and nature of antisemitic acts and expressions vary considerably among European countries, but there is a broad consensus that the fight against antisemitism needs to span all parts of society, including media, sports, youth work and education.

The non-legally binding Working Definition of Antisemitism, adopted in 2016 by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), has proved a practical and useful tool by giving examples of contemporary manifestations of antisemitism and helping to raise awareness.

The European Commission is due to introduce the first EU strategy dedicated to combating antisemitism by the end of this year, which is intended to complement and support EU member states' efforts. In parallel, the Council of Europe's anti-racism body ECRI (the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance), is preparing specific recommendations to governments on combatting antisemitism which will include guidance on policy making, prevention measures, the protection of Jewish communities and law-enforcement.

Teaching about antisemitism and the Holocaust is an integral part of human rights education. The Council of Europe is therefore also working on a recommendation to governments which aims to promote teaching and learning about the history of the Holocaust and to pass on remembrance of Nazi crimes and their victims. Taking into account that there are fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors to bear direct witness, we propose an inter-disciplinary approach to remembrance, including historical documents, places of remembrance, media, music, art and literature.

All these initiatives are crucial at a time when antisemitism is on the rise. They should be implemented without delay. We should do all we can prevent a repeat of the horrific expressions of antisemitism that we have seen in the last two weeks. Protecting Jews and Jewish life is part of our common European values.