

Exchange of views with the Committee of the Italian Senate
against intolerance, racism, antisemitism
and incitement to hatred and violence

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Madam Chair, Senator Liliana Segre,

Honourable Members of the Committee,

I will not begin with courtesies, but with gratitude—for the example this Committee sets, and for the presence of Senator Segre, whose life embodies both the horror of hatred and the endurance of memory.

Today we speak about hate speech. But let us acknowledge something essential: hate speech is not just speech. It is force. It is the first step in a sequence that ends in violence. It draws its strength from repetition, from silence, and, regrettably, from political complicity.

Let us remember: the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers—it began with words: with mockery, with pseudoscience, with rhetoric that stripped people of their human dignity. History teaches us that hate speech is not the fringe of politics—if unchecked, it becomes its engine.

The Power—and the Weight—of Silence

I cannot speak here in the presence of Senator Liliana Segre without honoring her personal journey—and her silence. For decades, Senator Segre chose not

to speak publicly about the conditions of her deportation to Auschwitz. Her silence was not indifference. It was survival.

There are two kinds of silence. The silence imposed by others, by fear, by terror, by regimes of violence—like that of Nazism. And the silence imposed by oneself, born from pain too deep for words, or from the instinct to protect one's own soul.

Liliana Segre lived both. She knew the silence of terror—and the silence of dignity. When she finally chose to speak, she gave voice not only to herself, but to generations of others. Even when met with hate speech—from those too ignorant to know history, or too ready to romanticize authoritarianism—she remained what she is: a quiet but unwavering example of truth and resilience.

Her words say more than I ever could: “Soon I learned to keep my tragic memories and deep sadness to myself. Nobody understood me. I was the one who had to adapt myself to a world that wanted to forget the painful events that had just passed, that wanted to start again, eager for fun and carefree.”

This sentence contains both the wound and the strength of post-war Europe. And it reminds us that silence, too, has politics—and consequences.

Dear friends,

Hate is older than politics. The first act of violence in the Bible—the murder of Abel by Cain—was not triggered by weapons, but by jealousy, rejection, and rage. When God asks Cain, “Where is your brother?”, Cain replies: “Am I my brother's keeper?”

This is the eternal question. And it is moral: because hate speech begins where we stop recognizing the other as brother, as neighbour, as equal.

We have seen this pattern again and again: In Rwanda, where radio broadcasters called fellow citizens “cockroaches”; In the Balkans, where ethnic contempt ignited genocide; In Myanmar, where digital hate speech preceded persecution.

Even today, in advanced democracies, this logic re-emerges. It targets migrants, LGBTI+ persons, religious and ethnic minorities, and especially women who dare to participate in public life.

And all of this is accelerated by social media. Hatred no longer needs posters in the streets—it spreads through a “share” or a “tweet,” without accountability or rebuttal. Memes, hashtags, and viral videos have become the new vessels of intolerance. Their speed and reach surpass anything we have known before.

Just weeks ago in southern France, a man of Tunisian origin was murdered by his neighbor: A man who for months had posted racist and conspiratorial messages online. The killing was physical—but the preparation was linguistic, ideological, and digital.

The murder happened offline, but it was premeditated in the digital world. The words came first—the violence followed.

Facebook, TikTok, X, and other platforms have become arenas where racism, antisemitism, and homophobia are not treated as violations—but as content that drives engagement. The business model of “rage” has turned hate into clicks, and clicks into profit.

I would like now to say a few words about the Dual Responsibility of Politicians. As politicians, we are both targets and transmitters of public discourse. Our words define the boundaries of democracy.

If we allow hate into political language—even implicitly—we erode the very institutions we claim to defend. We cannot delegate this responsibility. We must act—with laws, with ethical codes, but above all with example.

At the Council of Europe, through the “No Hate Parliamentary Alliance” and cooperation with ECRI, we monitor, analyze, and propose tools to counter hate speech. But these tools require political will. And allies—like you.

We cannot speak of democracy in the 21st century without addressing digital radicalisation, bot-driven targeting, and orchestrated campaigns of verbal violence against women, journalists, politicians, and activists. We must demand transparency, regulation, and accountability from digital platforms.

Before I close, I must address a delicate, yet essential distinction. It is distinguishing Hatred from Political Criticism.

Antisemitism is one of the most persistent and dangerous forms of racism in European history. It is a wound that has not healed and resurfaces dangerously in times of crisis. We have a duty to condemn it firmly and constantly.

But equally important is safeguarding the right to political critique.

We are living in a moment where the conflict in the Middle East generates intense passion and disagreement. Political criticism of the policies of the State of Israel—as with any state—cannot and must not be automatically labeled antisemitism.

Otherwise, we risk weaponizing the concept of hate speech as a tool of censorship rather than a defense of human dignity. The fight against hate speech is not a fight against free speech. It is a fight for its democratic integrity.

Dear friends. We talk about the increasing of hate speech. My rhetoric question with a thought is if we can and how we should do this, to unlearn the envious, destructive language that divides us.

The German philosopher Carolin Emcke writes: "Hatred is not innate. It is learned. Therefore it can be unlearned."

Let us teach something else. Let us build a Europe where difference is not feared, but valued, where human dignity is not negotiated, where politics rediscovers its moral compass.

Because in the end, the opposite of hate is not only love—it is truth.

Thank you.