

Opening statement
by Dr Klein, Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish
Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism
at the panel discussion
during the Council of Europe informal meeting of the
Committee of the Ministers' Deputies

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**Ambassador Ruzs,
Minister Gulyás,
ladies and gentlemen,**

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you about the challenges and perspectives of combating and preventing antisemitism.

I would like to add two words to the title: instruments and opportunities.

Today, I will take a closer look at selected policies that we have identified as crucial elements in this fight in Germany.

Researching, preventing and combating antisemitism is an ongoing task which cuts across different policy areas and government levels and requires a holistic approach.

This understanding of preventing and combating antisemitism is not mere lip service; it provides hands-on instruction for our daily work.

In terms of organisation and structure, this means building stable networks of stakeholders and always considering Jewish perspectives – in all possible constellations.

Many different public and private stakeholders play a part in preventing and combating antisemitism, and contribute their expertise.

This opens up spaces and excellent opportunities for experience-sharing, allowing us to learn from one another and to coordinate our actions against hatred of Jews more closely.

So far, so abstract. But how does this play out in practice in the Federal Republic of Germany?

All 16 federal states and the Federation work together in a Joint Federal and State Commission to fight antisemitism and protect Jewish life. We meet regularly to discuss current developments, share best practices and coordinate common positions.

The Commission is pivotal to coordinating the fight against antisemitism at federal and state level.

For example, we have extensive discussions about how to effectively prevent and combat antisemitism in schools and how to promote openness to Jewish life.

Our first outcome is that this summer, the Commission, the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs – Germany’s leading body for coordinating the federal states’ education policies – and the Central Council of Jews in Germany presented joint recommendations on dealing with antisemitism in schools. The aim is to name, investigate and fight antisemitic incidents in schools in an even more systematic way.

One recommendation is that education authorities should use the IHRA working definition of antisemitism as a shared basis for assessing antisemitism. Other recommended measures include establishing more partnerships with schools in Israel and more exchange projects.

School and nursery school teachers are essential in preventing antisemitism and must be supported in doing so.

School is not only a place of formal education, but also a place to socialise and gain interpersonal skills – a place which plays an eminent role in social learning.

In addition, the Federal Government supports civil-society projects bringing together expert knowledge from different domains. The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs funds the Competence Network on Antisemitism, of which I have the honour of being patron. In this network, five renowned institutions cooperate in this network on documenting antisemitic incidents; counselling people affected by antisemitism; preventing antisemitism; and providing education critical of antisemitism.

These were two examples of how different stakeholders cooperate at national level. I consider it to be one of my main tasks to create an even closer-knit network among them.

Last year, Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić created the new position of Special Representative on Antisemitic, Anti-Muslim and other forms of religious intolerance and hate crimes, thus giving top priority to these urgent topics. Special Representative Daniel Höltingen has become a new node in the “network of networks” to fight antisemitism.

In terms of European cooperation, I am delighted that the general policy recommendation no. 9 on the fight against antisemitism was published last week and that it also underlines the need for a holistic approach.

If strategies are to be successful, it is essential to draw on existing strategy papers and measures, and to avoid creating duplicate structures.

Ideally, the national strategies should tie in with considerations at EU level – the Commission will presents its strategy this autumn – and promote cooperation in particular where a European perspective is likely to deliver insights and links which are also valuable at national level.

I will now move on from organisation and structure and take a closer look at the current state of antisemitism in all its forms. Antisemitic attitudes often go back a long way; they are an integral component of extremist ideologies; and surveys show that they are also found in society at large.

But they also keep on taking new forms, be it Israel-related antisemitism or antisemitism during the COVID-19 pandemic: they are evident in antisemitic conspiracy myths, downplaying the Holocaust, and mocking the victims of National Socialism. The “unvaccinated” patches resembling the Star of David and worn during protests against COVID-19 policies represented such a mockery.

The question of how antisemitism manifests itself in society must be asked, addressed and answered time and again, also so that we can better manage countermeasures.

From the outset, I’ve been committed to thoroughly documenting all antisemitic incidents and providing victims with the assistance and services they need.

The question of how antisemitic offences can be reduced is closely linked to the question of how to reliably record all antisemitic incidents, including those that do not constitute punishable offences. Our aim must be to reduce the number of undetected and unreported cases.

Civil society organisations make an important contribution here. One of them is the Federal Association of Departments for Research and Information on Antisemitism, which is also part of the Competence Network on Antisemitism that I mentioned earlier.

According to the association's annual report, a total of 1,909 antisemitic incidents were recorded across Germany in 2020.

Over a quarter¹ were related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including 284 cases of antisemitic content spread during protests against coronavirus measures, for example in speeches, on signs, or on clothing. According to the association, the COVID-19 pandemic offers an “opportunity structure” in which antisemitic attitudes can be articulated.

The internet too has an enormous impact on the spread of antisemitic attitudes. Over one third of all antisemitic incidents recorded by the association across Germany occurred online.² However, antisemitism online is not an isolated phenomenon. The online and offline worlds are extensions of one another. They interact, and we must become better at understanding their dynamics and how they influence one another.

¹ 489 cases, 25.6%

² 644 cases, 33.7%

In our work of fighting antisemitism, we are facing concentrated and concurrent challenges which – to further complicate matters – are highly interdependent.

And since “when” and “where” are often hard to predict, it is all the more important to respond to this high degree of uncertainty with a structural “how”.

We must prepare well to find new and viable solutions for the challenges of today and tomorrow and to push back against hatred of Jews.

Thank you for your attention.