



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING TO EXAMINE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS IN RESPONDING TO HATE CRIMES

16th of July 2019

Intervention by Alina Bricman - President of the European Union of Jewish Students

Thank you Mr Chairman, distinguished Committee members. It is an honor to appear before you today - my name is Alina Bricman, I chair the European Union of Jewish Students, the 40 year old umbrella organization of national Jewish student unions across Europe. We operate in 35 countries and represent over 160 000 young Jews - 10% of Europe's Jewish population. We represent them to the European Union institutions, the UN Human Rights Council, the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and other international bodies, Jewish communities, civil society, the youth sector, and as of now - the US Congress.

EUJS cultivates pluralism, recognizes the value of interfaith and intercultural dialogue and speaks the language of universalism, driven by a belief that Jewish rights are Human rights and human rights are Jewish rights.

On the 4th of July, as the United States was celebrating its Independence Day, we were taking note of an important milestone: the first ever EU wide report on the perceptions and experiences of antisemitism among *young Jews* - a report by the European Commission and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, drawn up by the Jewish Policy Research Institute at our request. For the first time, we had data to back up what we intuitively knew and to paint a sourced picture about who young Jews in Europe are.



The report showed troubling results:

44% of young Jewish Europeans experienced antisemitic harassment - so almost 1 in 2 young Jews, which is 12% higher than their elders.

80% of young victims do not report harassment to the police or any other authority;

45% of young Jewish Europeans choose not to wear, carry or display distinguishable Jewish items in public because they are concerned about their safety.

41% have considered emigrating because they did not feel safe living in Europe as a Jewish person;

85% are targets of anti-Israel bias

Also, only 17% think Governments are effective in their work to combat antisemitism.

These numbers are worrying, and they represent a broader global trend.

However, what we also got to see is the passionate and engaged attitude these young people hold towards the world:

- 81% of the young Jewish Europeans declared the strength of their Jewish identity to be high;
- They also understand the issues faced by other communities and feel part of a global community: 81% of young Jewish Europeans believe racism is a problem in their countries and 74% perceive an increase specifically of anti-Muslim hatred

The task before us and you today is to understand how to best mobilize this enormous social capital: how to best help these 81% of young Jews, for instance, who say their identity is strong to make positive change in our society.



THREE THINGS:

1. Invest in education: From the highest levels of political decision making, a strong commitment to antiracist education must come forward. This ought to trickle down to ministries of education, policy makers, university bodies and eventually teachers and students. Anti-bias trainings, a better understanding of contributions of minorities to the social fabric and a positive, celebratory approach to diversity are key.
2. Support civil society initiatives: Civil society is at the forefront of intercultural dialogue, bringing to life original and constructive solutions. Funding as well as, visibility and cross-party political support should be made ready to them.
3. Depoliticize antisemitism and racism and engage responsibly in the public arena: antisemitism, racism and extremism are not left or right issues, they show their ugly teeth across and outside of the political spectrum. Antisemitism is a complex phenomenon, best described by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition and its examples. Governments should work to mainstream this definition and align their discourse to it, without instrumentalizing such important topics as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, immigration or Holocaust remembrance.

I can assure you, EUJS is ready to be a trustworthy partner in the fight against intolerance, as are so many amazing civil society bodies and individuals: we are ready to contribute our fair share - we only need the political will to support it.