

MANIFESTO

2024

EUROPEAN JEWISH LIFE



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Manifesto for European Jewish Life 2024

This year, since Hamas's massacre on Israel's southern border on 7th October and Israel's subsequent war against Hamas, Jewish communities across Europe have seen an alarming increase in antisemitic incidents. An atmosphere of hostility and the threat of physical violence hangs over not only synagogues, community centres, and public Jewish gatherings but also over individual Jews as they go about their daily lives. Safety and security are now at the forefront of our manifesto, along with the need to tackle religious extremism and hate speech, and to strengthen educational programmes, all to combat this increase in antisemitism. Such a focus is vital not only for protecting Europe's Jewish citizens but to maintaining our values as a democratic society.

However, safeguarding active Jewish rights also remains critical to ensure Jews can continue to live and thrive. The Conference of European Rabbis (CER) has always been driven not only by this obligation to fight hate and antisemitism, pressing now more than ever, but to protect and build Jewish life, promoting a flourishing Jewish identity and community in the European Union. Again, this too is a vital aspect of preserving Europe's democratic values. This has permeated our organisation's work since our establishment almost seventy years ago and will continue, actively building in the face of intolerance.

Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt
President of the Conference of European Rabbis (CER)

March 2024

Summary of Structure

This manifesto is divided into two sections:

Part One: Combatting Antisemitism

The first section articulates our commitments to keeping Jews safe and combatting anti-semitism. This is our call for the EU to take concrete action to protect Jewish people across the continent.

Part Two: Protecting Active Jewish Religious Rights

Strategies against antisemitism are vital to protect Jewish life from external threats, yet to even have Jewish life and communities in the first place, Jewish active religious rights must be allowed to be practised.

Thus, this second section proposes that governments must respect active Jewish religious practices, crucial to maintaining Jewish life, and fully understand the possible consequences of banning them, hindering Jewish life. It advances that the EU is uniquely placed to strive to enact stronger legislative safeguards for these religious rights.

PART ONE: COMBATTING ANTISEMITISM

Introduction

This manifesto serves as an urgent call to action, urging governments, institutions, and citizens across the EU to work together to eradicate antisemitic beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. **Antisemitism, in all its forms, harms not only the Jewish community but also our society's moral and democratic foundations.** These crimes corrode our integrity as a society. We are committed to combatting antisemitism within the European Union.

Increased Legislation Against Physical and Online Hate

We stand by the European Commission Statement on antisemitic incidents in Europe (5 November 2023) and call upon every EU Member State to strengthen legislation specifically around antisemitic acts, including hate speech, discrimination, intimidation, and physical violence. Existing laws must be rigorously enforced, and legal frameworks updated to tackle emerging forms of antisemitism, both online and offline.

The West should only welcome people who desire democracy, tolerance, contributing to society, in one way or another, and peace. Frighteningly, the values of some groups, proclaiming themselves as religious are directly opposed to democracy, tolerance, cooperation, and peace. Adherents of such ideologies, possessors unfortunately of such a clashing value system, who then actively seek to harm innocent citizens in Europe, must be tackled. **We as a continent must begin to reject all forms of hate.** Intolerance, violence, and of course, the brutal attacks, such that litter European headlines, must be condemned not just verbally but in policy and politics as well.

As the Conference of European Rabbis (CER) has already delineated in our 2015 manifesto, social media forums are seeing rising levels of harassment and threats. These comments can be racist, sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic, and of course antisemitic. The ideas that underpin hate speech online are directly linked to the ideas that underpin violent actions offline. It is essential to combat online hate speech not only for the mental effects it has on victims but because of the physical threat of violence it poses as well.

Hate speech, both offline and online, is a criminal offence under EU law, but we find little in the way of prosecution. While legislative measures to combat hate speech are prevalent throughout the EU and efforts are being made to prosecute hate speech, these measures are frequently overshadowed by diverging national frameworks and procedural deficiencies in several areas.

Cross-border harmonisation of EU laws on online safety is a key priority as crimes committed in this field are often transnational in nature. Failure to do so can lead to jurisdictional barriers and differing interpretations as to what constitutes hate speech in a particular Member State. We need substantive change. Social media companies must be held more accountable for the hate crimes enacted on their platforms and platforms must proactively moderate content more.

Education

Education is also a vital tool to challenge misconceptions and foster understanding. We advocate for comprehensive educational programmes across schools and institutions to further raise awareness about the Jewish community within the EU, its rich history, and its unique contributions, to tackle misinformation and hate. The **Erasmus+** programme, the EU's flagship programme to empower young people and support their education and training, can help in this regard. We call on MEPs and EU policymakers preparing the future Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme to find ways to improve the teaching of Jewish life and culture across the EU, as increased awareness helps to fight discrimination and intolerance.

We further urge the EU to **work closely with international organisations**, such as UNESCO, by collaborating to create effective strategies and suitable resources to combat antisemitism with educational and enrichment programmes, for people of all ages.

Heightened Security

Recognising the importance of safeguarding Jewish communities, we stress the need for increased security measures, as has already happened in countries such as France and Germany. **This includes close collaboration between police, community leaders, and any**

relevant organisations to establish effective security systems, ensuring the safety of Jewish institutions and individuals across the continent. We welcome the Commission's initial call for EU funding to better protect public spaces and places of worship, with €24 million made available in 2022 to complete this objective. However, considering the gravity of the problem and the increasing insecurity more resources are needed. We call upon MEPs to earmark at least €50 million per year in funding to protect and foster Jewish life in the next long-term budget of the EU, the multi-annual financial framework (MFF).

Interfaith Dialogue & Social Cohesion

We wish to conduct forums of dialogue between various faith leaders to create understanding and respect among religious communities. We would encourage setting up conversations between our President and other faith leaders, promoting cooperation and alliances to fight all forms of hate.

However, **any interaction between faith leaders and representatives must be conducted with a firm commitment to urge communities to stop all forms of hate speech, intimidation, indoctrination, and violence.** All too often, interfaith dialogue has been conducted to no real effect other than the conversation or meeting itself. Now, it must be done to achieve an abating of antisemitism, discrimination, and xenophobia, openly and robustly, with assurances from faith leaders to educate and speak out to their communities.

We recommend a signed public declaration that such a declaration, against antisemitic violence, from faith leaders will be made after such interfaith meetings.

In collaboration with governments, civil society and private sector we also call for more comprehensive efforts to strengthen social cohesion, security and tolerance in Europe and promote moderate religious practices, integration and positive citizenship to counterattack the abuse of religion, extremism, and terrorism both on and off-line.

This requires measures to enhance control and transparency about what is preached in mosques as well as in other places of worship and by whom they are financed as well as which foreign and digital influences encourage extremism, violence and terrorism.

European leaders should actively foster the training of religious leaders that must take place in Europe and be certified according to a strict catalogue of criteria, including the obligation to show loyalty to the laws that apply here, to profess peace and tolerance and to communicate these principles to their communities.

Media & Social Media Platforms

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion. **We call upon the EU to ensure that media outlets exercise responsible reporting and robust investigative practices**, avoiding the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes or biased narratives. Responsible journalism helps foster a better informed, tolerant society.

Social media platforms also have a duty to take the necessary steps to address the harmful impacts of antisemitic content, disinformation and extremist propaganda such as false and toxic Middle East narratives. The 1978 UNESCO Media Declaration could be a useful guide for this. Even in today's technological age, the Declaration can serve as a moral compass for Member States, tech and media companies providing any sort of communication service. More specifically, the EU must ensure that its new rules on content moderation contained in the Digital Services Act (DSA) are effective in tackling the spread of antisemitic hate speech. But the DSA may not be enough. Given that the DSA is focused on what individual Member States consider as "illegal" speech in their national law, the rules will give way to a range of interpretations that may not always protect Jewish life. It is possible, therefore, that the DSA on its own would fail to provide the tools to effectively reduce online antisemitism in Europe on a large scale. Additional steps will be required, such as the establishment of specific monitoring obligations for platforms pertaining to antisemitic online content. Concerning legal but harmful speech, such as disinformation, the EU should continue to implement the steps laid out in the EU's European Democracy Action Plan while creating opportunities for Jewish organisations to collaborate with the regional hubs of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) to develop community-led initiatives to fight disinformation through well-informed fact-checking.

Call to Action for EU Institutions in the 2024–2029 Mandate

- Ensure that legislation is updated and applied to tackle all forms of antisemitism and hate, in society and online.
- Increase educational programmes, working with international partners, to dispel biased and harmful narratives.
- Continue to push for increased security in synagogues and Jewish community centres throughout Europe.
- Encourage interfaith dialogue to form alliances to fight all forms of hate, with public letters from faith leaders condemning antisemitic acts.
- Mobilise religious and community leaders play an active role in improving the security of their communities and to counterattack the abuse of religion.
- Ensure that media outlets conduct responsible reporting.
- Ensure social media and tech platforms take appropriate steps to address antisemitic content and the harmful impacts of disinformation and extremist propaganda.
- Collaborate with governments, civil society and private sector to combat hate crime, extremism, radicalisation and terrorism both on and off-line.

PART TWO: PROTECTING ACTIVE JEWISH RELIGIOUS RIGHTS

Introduction

Jewish communities can only thrive if they can practice the traditions and customs of their faith. Moreover, antisemitism is a cross-border and transnational phenomenon, it, therefore, requires an EU approach. The European Commission’s Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life (October 2021) is encouraging, but more action is needed as Member States have not sufficiently protected Jewish religious rights and freedoms. To reflect the EU’s commitment to protecting religious rites, associations and communities set out in the Treaties, **legislative safeguards must be enacted to protect these practices that are so integral to Jewish life.**

Shechita

One of the most critical issues facing Jewish communities is the status of Shechita (humane Jewish religious slaughter). The 1979 Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter and the EU’s Council Regulation 1099/2009 require stunning before slaughter but allow the Member States to pass their own regulations concerning “slaughtering in accordance with religious rituals”. Most Member States have no restrictions on religious slaughter or have established derogations to uphold religious practices. However, an increasing number of countries have banned all non-pre-mechanically stunned slaughter. The production and provision of Kosher meat, however, is vital for Jewish life.

The European Parliament, in a recently published paper, Religious Slaughter Reconciling Animal Welfare with Freedom of Religion or Belief (June 2023), has, to an extent, clarified the sinister history and clouded controversy around the issues of animal slaughter and welfare and popular opposition to Shechita. However, The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling (February 2024), which upheld the 2018 ban by the Belgian regions of Flanders and Wallonia on kosher and halal slaughter, effectively stamps out any understanding of these rights from legislative bodies and establishes a threatening precedent.

In the wake of the ECHR ruling a petition to the UK Government and Parliament was launched in February 2024 to ban non-stun slaughter. At 10,000 signatures, the UK Government will respond to it, and at 100,000 the matter will be debated in Parliament. Troublingly, explicit legal protection of Jewish religious rights now seems a distant dream.

Other Jewish Religious Practices

Brit Milah, Jewish education, and Jewish dress are three other areas of Jewish religious rights that stand exposed and under threat of legislative bans in various Member States. Since the last decade and before, there have been several political attempts to challenge Brit Milah, primarily in Scandinavia. In the UK, there is a very committed and vocal Humanist lobby, with a particularly strong presence in the medical community. This discourse frequently neglects a proper consideration of freedom of religious rights. The European Commission is uniquely placed to protect our communities and we urge them to do more, and quickly, to protect Jewish religious traditions, customs and practices.

The Conference of European Rabbis (CER) will continue to call on European authorities and governments to engage with religious communities before any legislation affecting our communities is issued. We will lobby governments and the European Institutions to restore practices such as Shechita and Brit Milah where they have been banned and protect practices where they are under threat, as we have done since our founding, and continue to push for expressed protective legislation.

Call to Action for EU Institutions in the 2024–2029 Mandate

- Ensure that the Jewish community is meaningfully consulted on any legislation affecting Jewish life.
- Advocate in favour of the European Commission to create Union-wide legislative safeguards on Jewish religious rights.
- Advocate for member states to remove legal restrictions pertaining to Jewish practices.

Next Steps

The Conference of European Rabbis (CER) will now seek to build support for these measures among relevant stakeholders and would like to invite all those who are interested in supporting them to work with us to develop and refine these proposals.

We hope that through our dedicated work and prayers, Jewish life in Europe remains secure and flourishing and that we can successfully tackle the threats, both physical and in terms of religious rights, that face us today.



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