



Antisemitism as a Threat to Liberal Democracy in Europe

**Submission by B'nai Brith Canada to the
House of Commons Standing Committee on
Foreign Affairs and International Development
April 25, 2019**

B'nai Brith Canada believes that antisemitism, a clarion signal of other forms of racism and xenophobia, is a major threat facing liberal democracies in Europe today. In response to the Committee's questions, we believe Canada must work with European partners, and others, to counter antisemitism by:

- (a) defending the principles underlying international and intergovernmental agreements and promoting their relevance;**
- (b) leading a Euro-Atlantic effort to create a web of national action plans to combat antisemitism, with education as a central focus, drawing on the work of organizations such as the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights;**
- (d) recognizing the considerable work done by European Union institutions in analyzing antisemitism and taking steps to combat it, while noting that antisemitism continues to increase and the reasons need to be better understood;**
- (d) endorsing and joining European efforts to combat antisemitism as contained in the European Council's Declaration of December 6, 2018;**
- (e) elaborating in common a principle that people who hold or express antisemitic views must not be allowed to be members of political parties or occupy positions of government leadership.**

To supplement our recommendations below, we are proposing additional specific steps that have relevant in the European context, but which are not elaborated here, including the priority need to address online hate and acknowledge the considerable work undertaken on this subject in Europe.

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There has been a notable resurgence in antisemitism in Europe, described in the context section of B'nai Brith Canada's latest annual *Audit of Antisemitic Incidents in Canada* [being released this week] This is attributable to four basic factors:

- (1) changing demographics, including an immigrant and refugee population whose cultures of origin historically have been less educated about or intolerant of Jews;
- (2) a growth in right wing nationalism and extremism which stigmatizes 'the other', including glorification of historic figures who sympathized with or supported Nazi efforts to destroy Jewish life;
- (3) a diminishing memory of the Holocaust and its impact on Jewish consciousness, including a sense of moral equivalence in parts of Europe which faced oppression when occupied by the former Soviet Union; and
- (4) the demonization of Jews based on their contemporary ties to Israel and political differences over a search for Middle East peace, the so-called antisemitism from the left.

These factors are fed by the **challenge of uncertainty**. That increasingly European governments are perceived as not willing to, or not capable of, explaining to more skeptical publics the historical foundations of the post-World War II institutional order including the principles of democracy, rule of law, good governance and human rights & protection of minorities. The threat from this growing sense of uncertainty must be countered through a **sophisticated strategy of explaining the benefits citizens derive from key institutions meant to safeguard the rules-based international order**, even while acknowledging the need for strengthening those institutions.

An increase in **public skepticism over institutional authority**, places of learning and mainstream news sources has contributed to a diminishing awareness of what constitutes Holocaust denial and distortion, what constitutes antisemitism, and what information on the challenges is accurate and credible. There is a **sense within European Jewry that public leaders fail to consistently and factually speak out** against Holocaust distortion and denial, against specific acts of antisemitism, against media stories which fail to meet basic standards of fairness and accuracy, and against the conflation of antisemitism with criticism of the policies of Israel. Those Jews who place their trust in the protection of authorities have few options for recourse if their leaders do not condemn antisemitism and combat it.

What does this mean? In his 2015 book, *“Why Did You Do That? The Autobiography of a Human Rights Advocate”*, B’nai Brith Canada’s Senior Legal Counsel, David Matas, talks about the ‘four enemies that prowl through the human rights battlefield’ – indifference, absolutism, hypocrisy, sense of helplessness. For Matas, the antidote to exclusion or racism or apathy or intolerance, is connection. The **antidote to antisemitism, then, is to nurture a sense of connection between government and society and among members of society with their Jewish population.**

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published its major [‘Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism - Second Survey on Discrimination and Hate Crimes Against Jews in the EU’](#) in late 2018. Worryingly, the FRA survey concluded that:

- Antisemitism pervades everyday life.
- Pervasive antisemitism undermines Jews’ feelings of safety and security.
- Antisemitic harassment is so common that it becomes normalized.
- Antisemitic discrimination in key areas of life remains invisible.

If antisemitism is left to fester, the Jewish contribution to society is diminished as their concerns grow. If Jews feel less safe and secure, they may seek a geography more intent on protecting them. If antisemitic harassment is normalized, there is more widespread acceptance in the population at large, feeding both it and the prospects that other minority religious and cultural communities will be stigmatized.

The Survey proposes **several actions which should be taken by EU member states to combat these trends** >> actions which B’nai Brith Canada supports as helping to remove the threat of antisemitism to European democratic institutions and values. B’nai Brith Canada believes that **Canada and other European non-EU members should cooperate in deepening and extending the web of EU-wide ideas** to other liberal democracies through measures elaborated below.

The need to respond to the threat of antisemitism to European cohesion is highlighted in the [European Union’s Declaration of December 6, 2019, on the fight against antisemitism](#) and the development of a common security approach to better protect Jewish communities and institutions in Europe. But, as the Declaration states: “...Noting with concern that the situation for Jewish people has not substantially improved and that antisemitic hatred remains widespread as confirmed by the 2018 European Fundamental Rights Agency report on antisemitism...”

In April, 2018, B'nai Brith Canada proposed an ['Eight Point Plan to Tackle Antisemitism'](#), calling for creation of a Canadian national action plan. In the wake of the EU Council Declaration, several European Jewish organizations, led by **B'nai Brith International, the World Jewish Congress, the European Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee Transatlantic Institute** presented [February 12, 2019, a ten-point action plan with expectations of European Jewry.](#) We commend both documents to members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Recommendations

Recognizing antisemitism as a threat to liberal democracies in Europe, and that the threat persists notwithstanding the European Union's commitment to act, B'nai Brith Canada believes that action requires **committed partnership between Europe Canada, and the United States**. Canada can and should work with its Euro-Atlantic partners to take the following steps to mitigate the threat of antisemitism to European liberal democracies and to inculcate in all European governments and institutions the principle of zero tolerance of antisemitism.

1. **Canada should embrace and support the key elements of the European Council Declaration of December 6, 2018**, and express a readiness to work with EU Member States and other European countries, and the United States, to apply the elements of the Declaration (and to publicize the underlying study by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency);
2. **Canada should commend to European governments the ten-point action plan presented by leading Jewish organizations on February 12, 2019**, as Canada should consider its application in the domestic context.
3. Canada should lead a concerned Euro-Atlantic effort to emphasize **the unique nature of the Holocaust as an act of genocide** among other genocides while ensuring that, separately, the **contemporary challenge of antisemitism is elevated in public discourse** and regarded as a threat to our social fabric.
4. Canada should lead a concerted Euro-Atlantic education effort to inform publics of the threat of antisemitism, as the European Fundamental Rights Agency has done, and **key international instruments that drive our efforts to combat antisemitism** – such as the [Stockholm Declaration on the Holocaust](#) (2000); the OSCE's [Berlin Declaration on Antisemitism](#) (2004); [London Declaration on Combating Antisemitism](#) (2009), and; the [Ottawa Protocol \[of parliamentarians\] on Combating Antisemitism](#) (2010).

5. Canada and those Euro-Atlantic partners who have not done so should **adopt and implement the working definition of antisemitism of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance** and seek its application by state/provincial and municipal governments and by industry.
6. Canada should convene with its Euro-Atlantic partners and others interested a **regular high-level forum on the challenges of antisemitism and means to combat it, including triennial reviews of progress**. (In September, 2016, Canada co-hosted a High Level Forum on Global Antisemitism at the United Nations which considered the different factors that are leading to the rise of antisemitism in many parts of the world and the need for effective and proactive responses by governments, civil society and the private sector in addressing this challenge).
7. Canada and its Euro-Atlantic partners should commit **to developing an agreed framework for comprehensive national action plans to combat antisemitism**, involving federal, state/provincial and municipal levels of government, and **to domestic strategies of consultation and engagement** with Jewish community organizations and other civil society partners.
8. Canada and its Euro-Atlantic partners should commit to **countering antisemitism as part of promoting human rights and religious freedom globally**, including in human rights dialogues with other countries.
9. Canada and its Euro-Atlantic partners should **publicly excoriate political figures who express antisemitic views** and work towards development of a common principle that people who hold or express antisemitic views must not be allowed to be members of political parties or occupy positions of government leadership.
10. Canada and its Euro-Atlantic partners should continue to **speak out against** the threat of right wing nationalism and extremism, including actions and policies **glorifying historic figures, military units or governments who sympathized with or supported Nazi efforts** to destroy Jewish life during World War II, as called for by B'nai Brith Canada in its [open letter to the Prime Minister of July 4, 2018](#).
11. Canada and its Euro-Atlantic partners should **commit to concerted action and a declaration of intentions in the lead up to key 2020 anniversaries**: the 10th anniversary of the Ottawa Protocol on Combating Antisemitism; the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm Declaration on the Holocaust; and the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and 75th anniversary of the end of World War II.

In respect of these recommendations, we **commend to the Standing Committee the four 'opinions' published by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in its 2018 survey**, directed at EU Member States but, in B'nai Brith Canada's judgement, applicable throughout Europe to confront antisemitism as a threat to liberal democracy:

- EU members of should facilitate the integration of measures dedicated to preventing antisemitism into national action plans and strategies;
- EU members should systematically cooperate with Jewish communities in the area of security and protection of Jewish sites;
- EU members should fully transpose into national law victims' rights policies to ensure that victims of antisemitism receive the support they need when antisemitic incidents are reported to the authorities [or Jewish community organizations].
- The EU and its members should ensure that victims of antisemitic discrimination are encouraged and facilitated to report incidents to the authorities, equality bodies [human rights commissions] or thirds parties [Jewish community organizations].