

Dear Friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Since our founding in 2002 we have come a long way. 29 members in 21 countries, and growing fast now. A partner of the European Commission since the beginning of this year, and working together with the Commission monitoring the covenant with the Social Media. Training members and others, educating on online hate, countering hate through narratives, removal, legal action when necessary. Publishing reports on the nature and scope of cyber hate, supporting and creating campaigns, helping members to build capacity. During the coming years we plan to do even more.

We are doing quite well. But the world is not. Hate speech, fake news and false information are taking over. Left and right wing extremism. Islamism. Terrorism. Ultra-nationalism. A full-frontal attack on liberal democracy is in process. Extremists taking over, while moderates in the centre find it increasingly harder to be heard or be taken serious, and to supply solutions for the problems of our age. Formerly progressive mainstream parties becoming toys of antisemites or of those who hate Muslims, refugees and migrants. New protest movements, in their zeal attacking free speech, e.g. at Universities. Anti-EU sentiments. Brexit. A European population that increasingly does not understand anymore why the EU was founded and that it has kept us secure during the last 72 years. Generations growing up without basic knowledge on history. Democracies in the East going back to old evils. Like the national pastime of persecuting Roma. All these issues mixed into a dangerous mishmash.

The internet, our everyday living environment, is the main tool of hate mongers. It is increasingly also used as recruitment, propaganda and command and control instrument of violent extremists and terrorists.

To know how to deal with this effectively, we need to hear from our expert-speakers. We have a wealth of those here today. Experts on de-radicalization. On the various extreme movements. On counter-measures and counter-action. We have Sociologists, Police, judiciary, experts of Law, ideologies, Religion. We have a de-radicalized terrorist who works on de-radicalisation of others. We have the Social Media, Ministries, Intelligence Organizations and Projects, researchers, writers. We have you, the participants.

Standing in this building, the old head office of the General Diamond Workers Union of the Netherlands, the first Labour Union of this country and the mother of the later Socialist Labour Union, it is easy to draw parallels between its demise and our present situation. Since it was a mainly Jewish Union, and most of its members were murdered in Auschwitz and Sobibor. At the end of this street you will find the Auschwitz Mirror Monument. Go have a look when you have the time.

Parallels there are, certainly. But we like to think we are better prepared, we know what can happen when democracy is killed by extremists from any side. The Diamond Workers Union and its founder and leader Henri Polak were very much striving to lift up people, to educate and to eradicate ignorance. That is something we recognize, a legacy that fits us well.

I like to thank The European Commission, the German Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Facebook and Twitter, and all speakers, moderators and rapporteurs, for making this conference possible.

I wish you all a great and productive conference!