

Antisemitism on the Web: Current Situation and Remedies

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For a brief moment of time, we thought that the wound of antisemitism was healed and that Europe had turned this sad chapter of its history. But recent events that occurred all around Europe show that antisemitism is more present than ever. It started at the beginning of the 21st century, with a resurgence of violent and virulent attacks against Jews. Recent years have been marked by such attacks and their commemorations, which remind us that the Jewish community is still a target of hate crimes.

Antisemitism is wildly prevalent in new technologies. One of the main issues today regarding antisemitism is the standardization of this phenomenon on the web, which gives antisemitic speech a tremendously loud and hateful echo. The web is used largely to develop and spread messages, and the message of hate gets wide attention on the web, making the struggle against antisemitism one that needs to be tackled on a national and international scale.

In France, in particular, because of this situation, some Jews have started to question their identity as French Jews. They feel that they must make a choice between being Jewish and being French, as if both were incompatible. Driven by the desire to feel safe and protected, France has been powerless vis-à-vis a large part of the French Jewish community leaving the country for Israel.

Even if antisemitism was always prevalent amongst far-right extremists and branches of neo-Nazis, a trend is becoming more popular among some people from the Muslim community whose origins are from North African and Middle Eastern countries. It is actually more visible offline than online. The phenomenon is even more complex because this segment of the population can also be victim of hateful acts and speech. However, those who denounce the idea of a “double standard” between Jews and Muslims are in fact directly encouraging antisemitism.

Antisemitism is widespread on the web, where we can observe:

- The resurgence of conspiracy theories;
- The development of the trend called “the hidden antisemitism,” whereby people who affirm that they are anti-Zionist are in reality antisemitic. This trend has taken its roots in the geopolitical situation of the Middle East and is linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;

- The stereotypes from the Middle Ages that are resurging today;
- Holocaust denial and Holocaust distortion.

Current Situation of Antisemitism Online: Focus on France

In France, for more than a decade, antisemitism has been part of the societal landscape and is now more than ever a source of concern. All the indicators (police, NGOs) underline a very high level of online antisemitic acts.

LICRA (International League against Racism and Antisemitism), the French partner of the INACH (International Network against CyberHate) network, registered 1,122 hateful reports in 2015. Among the total, 458 have led to legal action and 176 concerned antisemitism: representing 36.6% of the total. The figures presented in the 2015 report by the online French police platform called PHAROS (*Plateforme d’harmonisation, d’analyse, de recoupement et d’orientation des signalements*) are even more disturbing regarding the situation in France between 2014 and 2015:

- Increase of 100% for apology of war crimes and crimes against humanity;
- Increase of 95% for denial of Holocaust.¹

There is no doubt about the consequences of online antisemitic speech. It is a vector for antisemitic violence in the real world. In 2015, according to the French Ministry of the Interior, 805 antisemitic acts were committed and led to filing a complaint, leaving the number of unfiled antisemitic acts largely unknown. Of course, 2015 was marked by the terrible attack of the kosher supermarket in Vincennes, where 29 people were taken hostage and four persons were murdered, three years after the bloodshed at the Ozar Hatorah school of Toulouse.

The Jewish Community Security Service highlights in its 2015 annual report that “Once again in 2015, Jews, who represent less than one percent of the total population, are the target of 40 percent of all racist crimes committed in France, and 49 percent of racist violent acts committed against people.” It should also be noted that many victims of antisemitic

1. Islamism on the Internet: Propaganda – Infringements – Counter strategies, Jugendschutz.net (2015).

acts said they preferred not to file a complaint for antisemitic insults, threats or minor violence.²

Traditional Forms of Antisemitism Far-right "Traditional" Antisemitism (Social Networks, Blogs and Websites)

As noted, antisemitism has always been part of the far-right extremist and neo-Nazi speech. On the web, far-right extremist websites and social network groups are quite active demonstrating, through their various publication, the supremacy of the White race and the danger "caused by" the Jewish people in Europe. They promote Nazi theories with strict symbols and codes. Among these far right-wing groups, other kinds of personalities and groups gravitate: political personalities, comedians and anonymous individuals.

Recently in France a political personality became famous on Twitter, Henry de Lesquen, by using typical antisemitic



hate speech. Lesquen is the director of "Radio Courtoisie," a far-right ultra-Catholic radio station and of the far-right think tank "le Club de l'Horloge." He is also planning to run as a candidate for the French presidential elections in 2017.

He published provocative tweets claiming that Jewish people are racist against all non-Jews and strongly believes in the "plot theory," that the Jewish people are responsible for the recent terrorist attacks in Europe. Lesquen's quest is for a homogenous and purely "European" society that belongs to an ideology that promotes a broken society by ostracizing individuals.

The "Fachosphere" (Own Popular Websites and Social Networks):

The "*fachosphère*" ("fascist-sphere") is the French term that denotes the group of the "famous" antisemitic-nationalist and fascist French personalities. It also defines the connections between these personalities, groups and political parties.

One of the well-known personalities of the "*fachosphère*" is Alain Soral. His well-known acolyte Dieudonné was sentenced to jail for antisemitic comments by a Belgian court.³ Soral, as Dieudonné, is also close to extreme-right groups.

Created in 2007, his website "Egalité et Réconciliation," a heap of nationalism, homophobia, sexism and antisemitism, became an association called "Egalité & Réconciliation." It also gave birth to a political party called "Réconciliation nationale."



In 2014, Soral declared: "I am not from the extreme-right, I am a National Socialist."

Using offensive opinions based on antisemitism, Holocaust denial and conspiracy theories, Soral created what is considered by many to be a "fascist business." On his website, an online shop offers books, t-shirts, mugs and lighters. Furthermore, he used each of his trials strategically to build a new media buzz.

Distortion and Denial of the Holocaust

A constant trend in today's antisemitic discourse is Holocaust denial and distortion, and a manipulation of the Shoah for antisemitic purposes. This is always present and popular on the web (mainly on U.S. blogs and websites, as well as video platforms). Many negationists



2. Outcomes of the first International Conference on Online Antisemitism, INACH and ISCA, April 19, 2016, Jerusalem.
3. Liege Criminal Court's judgment of Nov. 25, 2015.

have denied outright what happened during the Second World War, such as Norman Finkelstein in his book *The Holocaust Industry*, Robert Faurisson with his theory about the non-existence of the gas chambers and Vincent Reynouard denying the carnage of Oradour-sur-Glane: all of them have become popular on the web. Their theories are published on blogs, social networks, video channels and open online libraries.

Increasing Popularity of Conspiracy Theories

The resurgence of conspiracy theories is more than popular on the web: these theories accuse “Jews” of being responsible for the most recent and tragic events, in order to supposedly control the world. These theories have been quite popular since the end of the 19th century with the publication of the famously false book *“Protocols of the Elders of Zion.”*

The access to the web gave these theories a “second wind” by using the same approach as a century ago. For



example, conspiracy websites published many articles explaining that the terrorist attacks in Paris in January and in November 2015 were organized by Israel. Some of them also emphasize that ISIS is a creation of Israel. This antisemitic trend is similar to the 9/11 conspiracy theories according to which Jews were informed in advance or were behind the attacks.

Another popular trend on the European web was the explanation of the refugee crisis. The arrival of millions of refugees was part of the Zionist project to destabilize Europe by replacing White and Christian people with Muslims.

New Forms of Antisemitism

The “new” antisemitism shares most of its traits with the “old” antisemitism prevalent in Europe until the end of the Second World War. In many cases, political antisemitism and anti-Zionism are rooted in hatred against Jews. This new trend is becoming popular among some people from the Muslim community who originate from

North African and Middle Eastern countries.

BDS Movement and the Supposed “New Antiracist” Movement

Launched in 2005, BDS is a global movement of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel, coordinated by the Palestinian BDS National Committee, active in some European countries, such as the United Kingdom, Spain and France. The main objectives of the BDS are:

- ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied in June 1967 and dismantling the Wall;
- recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality;
- and respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN [General Assembly] Resolution 194.

This movement has been defined as anti-Zionist for many years. However, the line between anti-Zionism, anti-Israel feelings and antisemitism is more than thin and there is no doubt that it is an antisemitic movement.

In France, some legal cases have underlined the presence of antisemitic activists. In April 2016, the Court of first instance of Montpellier (France) condemned two BDS



activists (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement) for “incitement and Holocaust denial.” The case occurred in August 2014: Saadia Ben Fakha, 26, and Husein Abu-Zaid, 58, members of “BDS France 34,” the local branch located in Hérault, South of France, who shared on their public Facebook accounts a photomontage comparing the Israeli army to Nazis. They also published these comments: “Nazis and Zionists are two faces of the same coin” and “What Hitler did to Jews: it was done intentionally to give them rights and make them look appealing to the world.” On their Facebook pages, there were also public photos of dead Israeli soldiers with antisemitic comments, and photos of “quenelle” (Nazi salute) behind Jewish named streets and cities.

Even when the Montpellier local committee of LDH, which often participates in BDS activities, discovered the Holocaust-denial posting and requested its removal, the BDS movement did not explicitly condemn it until LDH turned to justice, and even afterwards absolved their activities of all responsibility. During their trial, both of them reiterated their being victim of bad judgment and judicial harassment.

The Court's judgment of April 6 is clear: a 3,000 euro fine and the two activists had to pay one symbolic euro in damages to each civil party that joined the case.

Another new trend of antisemitic speech is assumed by new organizations, which define themselves as



antiracist associations. One example is the *Parti des Indigènes de la République* (PIR), who have been at the center of many controversies in the past. One of its spokespersons, Houria Bouteldja, has often expressed antisemitic statements. In 2015, she posted a photo on Facebook where she showed her thumbs-up and smile next to a chair where it was written "Zionists at the Gulag." Her latest book is entitled "*The White, the Jews and Us.*" In June 2016, another member of the PIR, Aya Ramadan, tweeted "Dignity and pride! Congratulations to the 2 Palestinians who have led a resistance operation in Palestine #FreePalestine," in reference to the terrorist attack in Tel Aviv where four people were killed.

Terrorism and Antisemitism

Because of the web, incitement to violence against an individual or group is more prevalent today. It is easy to spread hateful and violent messages, and to recruit people. Antisemitism today in its most dangerous forms is more accessible on a global scale: present in mainstream social media, and using technology to access the deep-web, is now much easier. Antisemitism is a tactic used to radicalize, recruit people and promote terrorism around the world, especially in countries where strong Jewish communities live. The use of antisemitism is a key element of their hateful communication for radical groups in order to grow.

The most famous example is, of course, ISIS, which uses antisemitism as a key component of its recruiting process via the online platforms of Twitter and Telegram.

Islamists regularly exploit the conflict in the Middle East for antisemitic propaganda on the web. According to INACH German partner, Jugendschutz.net, "each time when there were new outbreaks of violence in the conflict between Israel and Palestine the propaganda became more extensive and drastic."⁴ Islamists always present Israel as a state that slaughters innocent Palestinian people, especially children. On Islamists' social media accounts, many pictures of children seriously injured are promoted with violent anti-Israeli captions. They portray Jews as "demons" who are conspiring against Islam in order to destroy all Muslims.

Using antisemitism as a recruitment strategy is efficient: most of the users, especially the young ones, are already sensitive to antisemitic speech. They quickly adopt these kinds of views without question, and express and promote the online antisemitic speech to which they are exposed.

Countering Antisemitism on the Web: Global Solutions and Remedies

The Internet can also be a tool to fight antisemitism.⁵

- *Civil society has to be involved in this fight*
Promote and support student-based targeted activism;
Promote, lobby for and support funding for NGOs;
Foster, promote and support awareness-raising programs incorporating core components on antisemitism, hate speech and the Holocaust targeting many audiences, including the wider public;
Make use of positive references of Muslim-Jewish shared common ground using Jewish and Islamic sources.
- *The Internet industry has to be involved. Without them, nothing can be accomplished.*

4. Islamism on the Internet: Propaganda – Infringements – Counter strategies, Jugendschutz.net (2015).

5. Outcomes of the first International Conference on Online Antisemitism, INACH and ISCA, April 19, 2016, Jerusalem.

Call upon the Internet industry to uphold and re-enforce terms of services that preclude hate speech;
Encourage the Internet industry to use technological means to prevent online hate speech, racism and antisemitism.

- *Social media can play a positive and pedagogical role*
Increase coalition building with the social media industry, working on shared goals;
Request and promote precise definitions and terms of service from social media and at the same time urge the social media industry to condemn terrorist exploitation of their services;
Require explanations from the social media industry on their use of algorithms.
- *The importance of legislation dealing with antisemitism*
Promote and support coalition building on an inter-governmental level to apply and enforce existing legislation against hate speech.
- *The importance of tools for reporting, monitoring and eradicating antisemitism*
Establish, identify and develop the capacity of national, regional and local legal units responsible for combatting cyberhate/antisemitism, to make stronger use of existing laws to prosecute cyberhate and online antisemitism and propose to legislators, consistent with the free speech constraints of each country, the enactment of legal grounds to prosecute cyberhate and online antisemitism where such laws are absent.
- Promoting strategy of counter-speech:
Promote the use of humor and irony as powerful weapons in counter speech (e.g. memes, hashtags, pictures, quotations);
Promote and support training on counter-speech.

Projects to Fight Antisemitism on the Web
Project "Get the trolls out!"



Standing up against antisemitism in Europe has never been an easy task. In an age where the nature and use of public communication are changing and when people get the news from their social feed engineered by social networks, monitoring media discourses seems likely to achieve limited results. However, with project "Get the trolls out!" all the European partners from Belgium, France, Greece, Hungary and United Kingdom have uncovered examples and provide insights into the use of antisemitic rhetoric that not only reveal patterns, trends and resonances in society, but are sufficient to take action against antisemitic speech.

Identifying antisemitic discourse, aimed at engaging young people around the importance of fighting antisemitism, has been possible only thanks to a team of volunteers and professionals who spend days scanning the web, to find examples of antisemitic discourse in videos, tweets, articles and posts.

In the "Get the Trolls out" project, one of the first actions was:

- Media monitoring focused on the diversity of media outlets regarding political opinions, online platforms and the countries involved. The common point in monitored media is the persistence of antisemitic hate speech.

Complementary to media monitoring action, all the partners have developed several positive actions:

- Mechanisms to publicize complaints: when the project's monitoring efforts detected antisemitic content in the media, the partners exposed and countered this content



using the most appropriate mechanisms: letters to editors, counter-speech on Facebook and Twitter, complaints to regulatory bodies and blogs on the given organization's website;

- Promotion of satirical cartoons;
- Production of video and radio shows;
- Pedagogical actions with students, as for example cinema-conferences and theatre plays focused on combatting antisemitism;

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- Development of a social media strategy with a project-dedicated website and a social media campaign.

INACH Project: “Research, report, remove: countering cyber-hate phenomena”

The EU-project “Research, Report, Remove: Countering Cyber Hate Phenomena” (2016-2017), developed by the International Network Against CyberHate (INACH), and European partners from Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands and Spain aims to provide a solid basis to draw sound conclusions on the concept of cyber hate. Systematic knowledge about the phenomenon, its origins and sources, as well as forms and influences, and will be gathered through comparative research. Through this cooperation, the project partners will jointly gather evidence about current trends in cyber hate and subsequently identify EU wide dynamics.

Furthermore, the project aims at developing standards to document and analyze cyber hate, as well as the removal of content. This will be done by establishing guidelines for Internet service providers (ISPs) and social network sites, as well as by providing support and advice to the political, legal and educational communities. It intends to create systems of monitoring and reporting cyber hate that might lead to a European- wide model for bringing new trends and problematic developments to the attention of politicians/decision makers on national and European levels, law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, NGOs; support to policy makers of Internet service

providers and operators from social networking sites.

Establishing a central contact point will help to develop a sustainable and effective cross-border online complaint mechanism available worldwide to all users from their home or mobile device. Regularly undertaken monitoring activities shall furthermore help develop an early warning system by continuously observing and analyzing hateful content on the internet.

The project partners particularly focus on the monitoring of antisemitism, hate against Roma and Sinti, hate against Muslims and homophobia.

Conclusion

In the face of the expansion of new technologies and new problems that come with the unlimited, unchecked and widespread dissemination of all kinds of information, we must develop global cooperation and involvement of all the main actors of the web: Internet industry, social media, intergovernmental and governmental organizations and of course civil society.

Three key points: Taking responsibility, creating awareness and getting involved.

“The price of greatness is responsibility,” said Churchill.

I hope there are many of us today who are ready to pay this price. ■

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