



## **Civil Society Forum on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life (16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of November 2022)**

### **Robin Sclafani, CEJI's director**

Dear colleagues, it is an honor to contribute to this panel which is so timely and critical to achieving a truly inclusive, equitable, and democratic Europe. Said so frankly last June, at the NOA National Report Card conference in Belgium, by the Co-Director of the Belgian Equality Body, Patrick Charlier, “if we do not reconcile the fights against racism and antisemitism, we will not advance on either one.”

Thank you for choosing this workshop and thank you to the EC for organizing it. It shows a recognition and a desire to overcome the obstacles which have slowed down progress on both antisemitism and racism.

CEJI claimed its mission to fight all forms of discrimination 30 years ago, and to do so through training and educational advocacy. Our work on antisemitism, explicitly as such, began 20 years ago, defined by the disaster that was the UN World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa 2001. Some of us who participated there actually flew home on 9/11. It was an exclamation mark connecting two distinct but related traumatic experiences, followed by years of conspiracy theories against Jews and Muslims, demonization, hate speech, discrimination, social exclusion, hate crime, terrorist attacks.

The NGO conference in Durban is a tragedy in that it failed to give the necessary visibility to the specific needs of different racialized peoples, and it effectively rendered invisible Black and Indigenous peoples, Roma, Sinti and Travellers. It is also tragic in how it broke coalitions which had existed for decades since the dawn of abolitionist and civil rights movements.



The only ones who win by fracturing cooperation across struggles for justice, equality and inclusion are extremists, most notably white supremacists, who were also forgotten in our obsessive islamophobia and who found fertile ground in the worldwide web to refine their messages and spread their antisemitic AND racist venom. Now we must also fight fascism, and this too we will only succeed if we do it together.

Over these last 20 years, we have learned better how to discern and decode antisemitism in whatever form it takes. But many in the Jewish world have also withdrawn from anti-racism spaces which has resulted in less mutual understanding and less solidarity actions.

We have seen Jews and Muslim organisations and individuals who try to build bridges be delegitimized in their own communities, prevention action for fear of their lives in the case of some Muslim allies, or for fear of losing community funding for Jewish organisations.

The Durban NGO conference is a perfect demonstration of the specific nature of antisemitism as an INSTRUMENT used to divert blame for the purpose of political power, and the rhetoric of that event still echoes in some debates over the IHRA Working Definition or in some debates about how to have complementary and/or integrated national strategies on racism and antisemitism.

Instrumentalization is one of the specificities of antisemitism, from the demonized Other created by the Church to establish Christian dominance, to the pogroms of the middle ages and 19<sup>th</sup> century Czarist propaganda, so well captured in the still circulating Protocols of the Elders of Zion, to the racializing theories which justified slavery and colonialization and fuelled Nazi propaganda leading to the Holocaust, and it didn't end there, which is why we are here today. The reality of modern-day antisemitism does not need to be explained or proven to this particular audience.



The Black Lives Matter movement brought to the forefront issues facing people of African descent and the need for remembrance and restitution for the crimes of slavery and colonialization. It was high time. It calls on those of us in white and white-passing bodies to recognize the advantages we take for granted and to do our part to dismantle structural and cultural racism which can still be found in all layers of society.

In yesterday's workshop on fostering Jewish life, several of the small groups reported the need for more inclusive practices within Jewish communities and more actions on issues of wider concern in order for more engagement in Jewish community life.

Intersectional approaches to racism and antisemitism and all other forms of hatred can offer us a more systemic understanding of the many dimensions of discrimination, and it can provide us opportunities to unite our struggles against oppressive paradigms and institutions. We are mutually concerned with many of the same historical, institutional and structural forms of discrimination, and many overlapping policy areas would help meet the needs of all discriminated people: remembrance, education, culture, security and hate crime, hate speech and media, discrimination and religious freedom. We can also learn from each other. For example, what can we learn from progress on gender, LGBT or Roma movements about how to better use strategic litigation? What can we learn from other racialized communities about how to strengthen the Race Equality Directive? How can Jewish communities' experience support other communities in developing better relationships with law enforcement, or how can we work together to develop remembrance and restitution policies? For all our frustration with the inconsistencies in Shoah remembrance across Europe, they are way more advanced than those policies, if they even exist at all, on Europe's history of enslavement and colonialization.



ECCAR is an excellent example of holding together the different struggles in their specificity, having launched a workgroup on antisemitism last year.

There should be no reason why Jews with all their intersecting identities cannot participate in other anti-discrimination movements. Why? Because a safe Europe must be safe for all on the basis of fundamental human rights. As we have heard so many times, the fight against antisemitism should not be the burden of Jewish organisations – it is a kind of re-victimization which activates transgenerational trauma – but Jewish voices in all their diversity must be heard, and Jewish communities must also hear the voices of other racialized and discriminated peoples, in all their diversity.