



**Conference on Addressing Antisemitism in the OSCE Region
Helsinki, 10-11 February 2025**

***Speech by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,
Ambassador Jan Braathu***

Dear Foreign Minister Valtonen,
Colleagues, President of the OSCE PA Pia Kauma,
Rabbi Baker, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address you today on an important topic that, sadly, continues to be relevant and concerning to this very day.

The fact that the OSCE conference on Addressing Antisemitism in the OSCE region has become traditionally the first conference on the agenda of each new Chairpersonship, is a sign of the weight that the OSCE places on the need to counter antisemitism, with all the tools at our disposal. Antisemitism is not only contrary to OSCE fundamental values, but also represents a threat to human rights, democracy and security in the OSCE region.

There is a (mistaken) perception that efforts to counter the dissemination of antisemitic content violate the right to freedom of expression. Antisemitic content is *not* “protected speech”, it is not protected under OSCE and international standards on media freedom and freedom of expression.

In fact, the opposite is true: freedom of expression and media freedom cease to exist the moment some groups within our societies cannot enjoy this right because their participation in the public discourse generates hate, incitement, and discrimination against them, solely as a consequence of their culture, language, religion or ethnicity.

Taking action to combat hate speech and antisemitism is therefore a necessity in order to ensure that everyone has the right to participate in the public conversation without fear of intimidation or retaliation, and so we all have access to a diversity of information and ideas.

In several core documents, OSCE participating States have committed to taking effective measures against antisemitism, while at the same time promoting tolerance, understanding, equality of opportunity and good relations between individuals of different origins.

OSCE and international standards in this area also clearly point to the need to take measures to restrict speech that incites hate and discrimination. There is no freedom to incite hatred and violence.

The 2021 Joint Declaration on Politicians and Public Officials and Freedom of Expression, issued by the RFoM together with all other Freedom of Expression mandate holders, states:

“Given the harm done by “hate speech”, including to the ability of its targets to exercise fully their right to freedom of expression and to participate in political activities, States should:

- 1. Prohibit by law any advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, in accordance with international law.*
- 2. Undertake a range of activities – including education and counter-messaging – to combat intolerance and promote social inclusion and intercultural understanding”*

As OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, I believe that only a holistic approach to combatting hate speech can bring effective results. This includes all the following responses:

- Putting in place adequate legislation;
- Ensuring that effective measures against antisemitism are considered in regulatory frameworks;
- Promoting educational and self-regulatory measures, which foster tolerance and non-discrimination.

Any such approach must also include the participation of the communities affected.

It is clear that our leaders – politicians and public officials – bear a high responsibility in terms of promoting equality and ensuring non-proliferation of hate-speech, including antisemitism. First and foremost, political leaders must refrain from disseminating hate speech themselves, a phenomenon that unfortunately we have observed in the OSCE region. Secondly, any restriction on content aimed at limiting hate speech and antisemitism should not provide special protection to officials.

While participating States hold primary responsibility in this area, two additional stakeholders are key in this process: Big Tech and news media.

As far as Big Tech platforms are concerned, today the highest single incidence rate of reported antisemitic harassment is related to online harassment. The strong presence of hate speech and antisemitism online leads to the normalization of antisemitism, which is not only unacceptable, but actually very dangerous. Online harassment is a breeding ground for offline, real-life attacks. Words matter because they can legitimise violence.

Big Tech platforms have the responsibility to moderate the content shared on their services in order to limit the dissemination of hate speech and incitement. While Big Tech has been using artificial intelligence for this purpose, this has brought only limited results as AI technology remains particularly weak in understanding the cultural, linguistic or contextual nuances necessary to detect hate speech.

Moreover, there are indications that the recent decision by some social media platforms to further reduce moderation has led to a sharp increase of hate speech disseminated through these platforms.

This problem is particularly concerning and my Office has been looking for strategies to address it as part of our efforts to enhance the availability and accessibility of quality journalism and public interest information.

The second player, whose contribution is key to limit the dissemination of antisemitic content, is the news media, which can play a very important role not only in countering negative prejudices and harmful stereotypes in its reporting, but also in promoting a culture of reciprocal understanding and tolerance. Codes of ethics and self-regulatory mechanisms must include provisions aimed at ensuring that news media does not promote hate speech.

This is recognised by the International Federation of Journalists in their Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists, adopted at the IFJ World Congress in 2019. Article 9 of the Charter states that *“Journalists shall ensure that the dissemination of information or opinion does not contribute to hatred or prejudice and shall do their utmost to avoid facilitating the spread of discrimination....”* This should indeed be always kept in mind, by journalists and editors alike.

To conclude, antisemitism requires a holistic, multifaceted and multistakeholder response. OSCE standards and principles in this area are clear. It is the responsibility of all participating States to ensure they are duly implemented. As Representative on Freedom of the Media, I will continue to engage in efforts to counter hate speech, online and offline, whether it is targeted at journalists or anybody else.

The right to freedom of expression and free media must never be abused to suppress certain groups in society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Antisemitism is a scourge on our societies and is a particularly vile form of hatred. History has taught us what the consequences might be. We must reaffirm our values and commitments and remain steadfast in our determination: Never again!

Thank you!