

Antisemitism as a form of exclusion and the controversy over its definition

Andreas Gotovos

Department of Elementary School Education University of Ioannina

a.gotovos@uoi.gr

Abstract

Antisemitism, understood as a particular manifestation of racism directed against a collectivity defined by religion, ethnicity, or a combination of both, constitutes a form of social exclusion. Such exclusion operates through formal and informal mechanisms that separate members of the targeted group from full participation in various spheres of social life. It may manifest as an outright prohibition from entering specific social circles or events, or as a conditional and restricted form of participation-one permitted only under special, typically unfavorable, terms. In both situations, inclusion is perceived as improper or undesirable, and when it occurs, it is often subject to heightened scrutiny or control. As with other forms of racism, antisemitism may persist within a society irrespective of the presence or absence of legislation explicitly supporting it. Moreover, antisemitism can remain operative even in contexts where laws formally prohibit ethnic or religious discrimination. This is possible because exclusion and discrimination may assume subtle or covert forms, legitimized through the selective or manipulative use of legal provisions that allow for differential treatment on ostensibly neutral grounds. The capacity of antisemitism to hide behind seemingly unrelated attitudes or arguments -masking negative sentiment toward Jews as a collectivity- raises fundamental questions about how the term "antisemitism" should be defined and what indicators are necessary for its identification and systematic analysis. This paper discusses the controversy surrounding competing definitions of antisemitism as it emerged before and after the recent Israel-Palestinian conflict, where legitimate political critique of the State of Israel is at times intertwined with antisemitic discourse disguised as purely political disapproval of Israeli policies or leadership.

Keywords: Antisemitism, Exclusion, Racism, Discrimination, Antisemitism Definition.

1. Introduction

The recent Israel-Palestinian conflict was accompanied by a rise of antisemitism in several European societies according to agencies responsible to monitor antisemitic sentiment and action in Europe and beyond (Staetsky, 2017; Kovács & Fischer, 2021; FRA, 2024; ADL, 2025). Political critique on the Israeli state for the scope and method of its response towards the Hamas attack on 7.10.2023 coexisted side by side with antisemitically based negative speech against Israelis or Jews as a collectivity, reminding the stereotypes and prejudice expressed publicly against German Jews after Hitler's party (NSDAP) seized power in 1933. What followed was at first a large-scale state sponsored institutional exclusion of German Jews from social, political and economic life, undoing in fact the historical process of Jewish inclusion which had been accomplished in the late 19th century in the same country. Institutional exclusion was then followed by physical extermination not only of the German Jewry, but of the Jews in almost all occupied countries leading to Shoah (Hilberg, 1990; Friedländer, 2007).

In the aftermath of the political and military collapse of Germany's National Socialist regime in 1945, the Nuremberg Trials (1945-1949) -and particularly the proceedings against the *Einsatzgruppen* (1947-1948)- together with the establishment and subsequent activities of the Central Office for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes in 1958 and the Auschwitz extermination camp trial (1963-1965), fostered a widespread conviction that the ideology inextricably linked to the genocide of Europe's Jews (antisemitism) had been



delegitimized to such an extent that its resurgence, especially within Europe, was virtually inconceivable.

This conviction, however, proved to be increasingly untenable as the decades passed. Across numerous European countries, both East and West, and even within Germany itself - the nation in which antisemitism had once been embedded in institutional structures- antisemitic incidents have continued to occur. These range from acts of desecration targeting Jewish monuments and direct assaults against Jewish individuals to the dissemination of antisemitic discourse in books, periodicals, newspapers, and, more recently, digital platforms. Moreover, the Federal Government's active promotion of initiatives designed to detect antisemitic hate speech online constitutes a telling indicator that the circulation of such material within the expansive digital sphere is neither marginal nor insignificant.

At this point, it is useful to draw a distinction between antisemitism as a psychological phenomenon - manifesting either as a negative mode of perceiving individuals who belong to the Jewish collective, whether as a nation, a religious community, or both; as a negative predisposition that inclines its bearer toward attitudes of suspicion, defensiveness, and social distancing; or, finally, as an inclination toward negative action, whether verbal or physical, directed against persons perceived as Jewish or against Jewish property, monuments, and symbols. Insofar as such perceptions, predispositions, and inclinations exist within an individual's inner psychological world but remain unexpressed, we may speak of latent antisemitism. When, however, these are outwardly expressed and become perceptible as manifestations of the bearer's inner dispositions, we may speak of overt or enacted antisemitism. Common to all types of antisemitism is that they constitute forms of exclusion.

2. The study

Although the term *antisemitism* does not, at first glance, appear to present semantic difficulties -since in all its manifestations it encompasses negative dispositions, attitudes, or behaviors directed against Jews or against objects and symbols associated with Jewish identity- there is, to date, no universally binding definition of the concept at the global level. One of the principal sources of difficulty in reaching consensus concerns the question of whether the term *antisemitism* should include not only empirically observable and documentable expressions of negative attitudes and sentiments (hostility, hatred, aggression) toward Jews (or toward individuals who are not Jewish by ethnicity or religion but who express friendly or supportive sentiments toward Jews), but also negative perceptions, predispositions, and inclinations (i.e., tendencies toward action) directed at this specific collective, which may indeed exist as psychological states yet remain unexpressed by their bearers. This divergence of opinion has given rise to two schools of thought -or, perhaps more accurately, two distinct conceptual frameworks- regarding the definition of antisemitism in the contemporary era.

The present study concerns the second category of antisemitism as it appears in various European countries. Its manifestations can be broadly grouped into four domains: the denial or trivialization of the Holocaust; the resurgence of historically familiar stereotypes regarding Jews; forms of covert antisemitism articulated through the perception and interpretation of Israeli state policies toward the Palestinians as expressions of an alleged inherent Jewish "nature" and through the attribution of collective responsibility to "the Jews" for such policies; and, finally, verbal or physical attacks against individuals (Jews) or objects associated with Jewish identity. These categories do not exhaust the possible forms through which antisemitism may be expressed by individuals holding such perceptions, predispositions, or



inclinations. They are, however, illustrative and represent the most common manifestations encountered in both public and private spheres of everyday life. Through critical analysis of texts on antisemitism originating from academic, organizational, journalistic and legislative sources the study discusses the development of the recent international debate on the definition of antisemitism and the constitution of its indicators.

3. Defining antisemitism: the controversy over its meaning and its indicators

3.1. Historical background

Historically there are two ways to approach antisemitism. The first school of thought conceives of antisemitism as a negative perception, a negative prejudice, and a correspondingly negative attitude toward the collective category “Jews,” together with whatever may potentially arise from these at the level of behavior (i.e., overt or enacted antisemitism). Its principal point of differentiation from the second “tradition” lies in its attempt to understand antisemitism as a specific instance of the broader phenomenon of negative stereotypes, prejudices, and attitudes -and their corresponding behavioral expressions- directed at a religious or, more commonly, an ethnic collective. From this perspective, antisemitism is regarded as a hostile stereotype and a hostile predisposition directed at the Jewish collective across time, whether understood as an ethnic group or a religious community. In essence, antisemitism is thus considered a subcategory of a general phenomenon that may be described as ethnic or religious prejudice and its practical manifestations. Its particularity lies in the fact that, in the case of the Jews, religious identity typically plays a significant role alongside ethnic identity (“Judeans”), although it should be noted that religion did not constitute the foundational basis of at least the National Socialist form of antisemitism. Perhaps the most tangible evidence for this view is that the exterminatory antisemitism of the National Socialist regime did not invoke religion as the defining trait of Jews but rather “race,” or, in contemporary terms, ethnic identity. This becomes particularly clear in the ideas articulated by the leader of the state that would later organize the Holocaust, long before he became Chancellor of Nazi Germany, in a characteristic speech delivered to supporters and officials of the National Socialist Party in Munich during the summer of 1920 (Phelps, 1968). Within this tradition, therefore, the study of antisemitism does not necessarily require analytical tools different from those employed by social psychology to investigate similar phenomena targeting other religious or ethnic groups, provided that these tools are appropriately adapted to the historical and synchronic conditions of the collective under investigation.

The second stream of thought maintains that antisemitism possesses a singularity that necessitates research instruments distinct from those used by the social sciences to examine ethnic or religious stereotypes and the corresponding prejudices, attitudes, and practices. According to this school of thought, the theoretical analysis of antisemitism cannot be subsumed under any of the established theories of racism or ethnic and religious conflict. Instead, it requires a separate theoretical framework -an autonomous theory of antisemitism- that takes into account the specific particularities of the phenomenon. The present paper adopts the first approach, on the grounds that the empirical investigation of antisemitism and the interpretation of its findings can be adequately supported by existing theories employed in the study of analogous ethnic or religious stereotypes, prejudices, attitudes, and practices.



3.2. Definitions of antisemitism and the study of the Holocaust

The mechanisms through which antisemitic beliefs, dispositions, and attitudes are formed in an individual's consciousness follow the same processes that underlie the development of negative beliefs and attitudes toward other social groups. Consequently, neither a special theory is required to account for the formation of antisemitic stereotypes nor distinct research tools for their detection, provided that such tools are appropriately adapted to the particularities of the case under study. The same applies to the interpretation of potential correlations between antisemitism and other variables. What distinguishes the stereotype of antisemitism, however, from analogous stereotypes and prejudices targeting other religious or ethnic groups is the phenomenon of *secondary antisemitism*: that is, beliefs held by an individual inclined toward antisemitism not about the supposedly characteristic traits of Jews themselves, but about a historical event intimately linked to them—namely, the genocide of the Jews (the Holocaust, Shoah) carried out by the National Socialist regime during the Second World War.

Beyond this distinction, which concerns the question of whether antisemitism should be subsumed under the broader category of racist phenomena, there is yet another distinction relating to the types of phenomena that should be classified as antisemitic, regardless of whether one accepts its inclusion within the general category of racial, religious, or ethnic discrimination. In this domain, one academic tradition maintains that antisemitism encompasses not only empirically observable expressions of negative perceptions, emotions, attitudes, and behavioral inclinations toward Jews and objects associated with Jews, but also the very existence of such negative psychological states, insofar as they may at any moment lead their bearer to express them verbally or through action (Schwarz-Friesel, 2013). The second tradition, by contrast, defines antisemitism with an exclusive focus on the domain of expression—particularly when the definition is intended to be incorporated into a state's legal framework and to serve as an institutional instrument for its prevention and suppression. At first glance, this restrictive definition of antisemitism appears justified regarding its potential incorporation into the legal framework of the state, insofar as negative beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, and dispositions that are not externally manifested cannot be the subject of police or judicial investigation and enforcement, at least within the context of Western legal traditions. However, any expression of antisemitic disposition presupposes the existence of antisemitic beliefs (stereotypes) and attitudes on the part of the individual expressing them. Thus, it is not unreasonable to speak of antisemitism in a society in its broader sense, that is, in terms of the existence of such negative beliefs and dispositions, irrespective of their external expression. All empirical studies and measurements of antisemitism—as a mode of perception and as a type of disposition toward Jews—proceed from the assumption that underlying psychological states can be empirically captured even if they have not necessarily been expressed or may never be expressed.

Beyond this central disagreement, additional difficulties impede the attainment of broad consensus, owing to two further factors. The first factor concerns the indicators of antisemitism at both the level of psychological states (negative stereotypes, hostile dispositions) and the level of their expression (speech, action). For example, should antisemitism be understood as encompassing any negative thought or disposition regarding the practices of particular Jews in the past or present, or only those directed at Jews as a collective? The second factor relates to negative perceptions and dispositions, and their corresponding expressions, in reference to the actions and policies of the Israeli state. Should antisemitism, for instance, be indicated by any political demonstration against the state of



Israel for specific actions it has taken against Palestinian civilians in the Middle East, or only by those demonstrations that equate the state of Israel with the Jewish people, attributing state policies to the collective category “Jews” and interpreting them through the lens of an alleged Jewish “character”? These examples clearly illustrate why a unified definition of the term *antisemitism* has not yet emerged -and, in our view, is unlikely to emerge in the near future- either within the scientific domain or within the political-ideological sphere.

3.3. Antisemitism: an interdisciplinary object of study

Within social sciences, the study of antisemitism as a social phenomenon spans nearly all disciplines, from History to Psychology. Already in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) undertake a philosophical analysis of the phenomenon, placing at its center the concept of the authoritarian personality. Historical and economic disciplines, in contrast, focus on contexts of social crisis and the transformations they precipitate, which provoke strong social reactions to necessary processes of modernization. One such case is the rise of antisemitism in Germany during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Although it is generally accepted that antisemitism at its core encompasses hostility toward Jews, different disciplines utilize different concepts to approach and investigate it. Thus Psychology approaches antisemitism through the concepts of *projection*, *identification*, *defense*, and *repression*, whereas Social Psychology uses the notions of *social construction*, *stereotypes*, *prejudice*, *social interaction*, and *reference groups*. Science of Education approaches it through the concept of *socialization* and the *internalization* of norms and models. Political Science, on the other hand, investigates antisemitism with reference to leadership and identification with authority figures. Common goal of all sciences involved is to illuminate the process of the emergence and evolution of antisemitism at both individual and collective or institutional levels (including antisemitism as state ideology).

Specifically regarding Germany with its burdened historical legacy as a nation whose leadership planned and implemented the Holocaust, Knothe (2009) distinguishes at least two forms of antisemitism: primary and secondary, the latter also known as “post-Auschwitz antisemitism.” Secondary antisemitism is more closely associated with intolerance toward a painful and humiliating memory for German identity, which generates aversion or hostility toward those whom the subject perceives as responsible-namely, Jews (ibid., 37). Of particular interest in the German context is the theoretical approach that conceives of antisemitism as a social construction and as a projection (Goldenbogen & Kleinmann, 2021).

From the discussion thus far in the academic literature regarding the nature, evolution, and resilience of antisemitism as a particular instance of negative prejudice and racism, it is clear that an unidimensional approach from a single discipline -regardless of which- is insufficient to grasp its deeper nature. Like many other social phenomena, antisemitism contains elements of continuity, such as certain ancient stereotypes of the “Jew” that are reproduced over the centuries (van Arkel, 2009), but it also incorporates new elements that reflect contemporary circumstances. The belief that Jews were responsible for the Covid-19 virus (CST, 2022) or for the related vaccine, and the associated references to global conspiracy theories (CST, 2020), constitutes only one example of antisemitism’s enduring adaptability over time and its ongoing search for new channels of expression. This resilience is the principal reason why addressing antisemitism as a distinct category of racism and ethnic thinking must occur through education, particularly if we accept that deconstructing the beliefs of an individual inclined toward antisemitism is more effective than merely condemning or threatening punishment for their potential or actual antisemitic behavior.



3.4. International organizations and the definition of antisemitism

Within the domain of intergovernmental, European, and international organizations, there has been, for the past two decades, significant activity regarding formulation, dissemination, and adoption of definitions of antisemitism. One political body that has developed such definitions is the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). This organization primarily comprises European states, but also includes countries in Asia, Canada, the United States, Australia among others. In addition to its full members, the organization also admits states with observer status. On 26 May 2016, in Bucharest, IHRA adopted a “working definition” of antisemitism, which had already been established in its core form as the working definition of antisemitism by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). As indicated previously, this definition belongs to the category of “expanded” definitions of the phenomenon and reads as follows (IHRA, 2016):

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

This constitutes a political, legally non-binding definition of antisemitism, created primarily to serve practical purposes -most notably the combatting of antisemitism- rather than to advance an academic clarification of the theoretical question of what antisemitism is from a scientific perspective. From the examples cited in the announcement accompanying the adoption of this definition, it is evident that they could not secure a broader, global consensus. The examples (i.e., indicators of antisemitism) encompass both psychological states indicative of an individual’s antisemitic orientation and the manifestations of those states in thought, speech, or action (IHRA, 2016).

Among the states participating in the IHRA, the United Kingdom was among the first to adopt the aforementioned definition of antisemitism, doing so in December 2016. However, the corrective amendments proposed by the House of Commons’ Home Affairs Committee, which investigated the rise of antisemitism in the United Kingdom in 2016 -particularly those concerning the linkage of antisemitism to criticism of Israel- were not accepted. The report submitted by the Committee on the issue of rising antisemitism in Britain provoked intense public debate on a range of issues, including the relationship between antisemitism and Zionism. Among others the Committee also heard testimony from Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the Labour Party, who, when asked about the definition of antisemitism, responded as follows¹:

“Antisemitism is where you use epithets to criticize people for being Jewish; where you attack Jewish people for what they are. It is completely unacceptable, and I would have thought it was very obvious what antisemitism is, just as much as it will be very obvious what Islamophobia is if you criticize Muslim people for what they are and what they are alleged to believe in, whether they believe in it or not.”

From Corbyn’s response, it becomes clear that, in his view, antisemitism constitutes a form of discrimination analogous to hostility toward Islam (Islamophobia), and that there is no need for a specific definition treating it as a distinct phenomenon. By contrast, the Committee held that a definition was necessary to clarify which actions in everyday life constitute antisemitism, so that such actions could be recorded and, to the extent that they

¹ https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/136/13605.htm#_idTextAnchor010



are legally punishable, prosecuted. The disagreement between Corbyn and the Committee regarding the necessity of a definition of antisemitism, as well as the suitability of the IHRA definition, is not confined to these two parties. Those who reject the specific definition - including political organizations, universities, student associations, non-governmental organizations, and public figures- generally invoke arguments similar to those advanced by Corbyn. Conversely, those who support the adoption and implementation of the definition refer to arguments akin to those put forward by the Committee.

3.5. The reaction of academia toward the IHRA definition of antisemitism

Following the United Kingdom, other states -including Greece- subsequently recognized and adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism, among them Australia, a full member of IHRA since 2019. Australia presents particular interest not merely because, in October 2021, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that the Australian state would adopt the IHRA definition as formulated in 2016, but also because universities within the country announced that they too would adopt the same definition and implement it across university campuses. This step sparked intense intra-academic and intra-student debates, effectively dividing universities in the country over whether the principle of academic freedom -encompassing freedom in research and teaching- is compromised by the adoption and application of this definition within the academic environment. The Australian government justified the adoption of the IHRA definition on the grounds that it constitutes an appropriate tool for addressing antisemitism.

The criticism that emerged immediately following the Prime Minister's announcement, however, was particularly intense. Opposition came not only from organizations sympathetic to Palestine and the Palestinian cause, but also from university authorities and academic associations, all of which expressed strong resistance to the Australian Prime Minister's initiative. Within the academic sphere, this gave rise to two opposing fronts: one advocating for the extension of the definition of antisemitism to universities, and the other opposing any potential application of the definition within academic institutions.

The conflict reached its peak when the administration of the University of Melbourne announced its adoption of the IHRA definition, becoming the first university in the country to implement the definition in practice. The administration's rationale for adopting and operationalizing the definition mirrored that of the Prime Minister: namely, that the IHRA definition constitutes an appropriate tool for addressing antisemitism within universities. By contrast, the principal argument advanced by opponents of the definition was that it undermines the principle of academic freedom in teaching and research and is highly likely to be instrumentalized to suppress legitimate criticism of the State of Israel regarding its policies toward the Palestinians, as well as to criminalize anti-Israel demonstrations by categorizing them as antisemitic actions.

The criticism directed at the University of Melbourne for its decision to adopt and implement the IHRA definition of antisemitism within the academic sphere reflects a broader pressure exerted by various civil society organizations against the adoption of a contentious definition that could serve as a tool for shielding the State of Israel from criticism regarding its handling of the Palestinian issue. For example, dozens of civil society organizations, including Israeli counterparts, petitioned the UN Secretary-General not to adopt this definition. Similar reactions and recommendations have been directed to the UN by other organizations and public figures. Intense criticism also came from Nick Riemer, president of the Australian Higher Education Union (Sydney), who characterized the pressure exerted by members of parliament



on universities to adopt the IHRA definition as a *“direct attack on academic freedom”* adding that *“a powerful lobbying group is striving to silence the course of free dialogue within universities.”* (Cassidy, 2023).

Nevertheless, this criticism did not prevent four additional Australian universities - Macquarie, Wollongong, Sunshine Coast, and Monash- from following the example of the University of Melbourne by the end of March 2023, thereby reigniting public debate over whether opposition to Israel necessarily constitutes antisemitism (Bradley, 2023). Australian-Palestinian student associations respond negatively to this question, which explains why they perceived the decisions of universities adopting the IHRA definition as a disappointing and adverse development. Conversely, Asian-Australian-Jewish student associations expressed similar sentiments and a corresponding evaluation regarding the developments when other universities in the country rejected the proposal to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism. A representative excerpt from a statement by the executive committee of this association at the University of Adelaide, issued following the administration’s decision not to adopt the definition, illustrates how the opposing side -supporters of the definition- assesses the situation in the wake of the rejection.

The rationale provided by the Australian National University (ANU) for its decision not to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism was somewhat different. In its announcement, the university did not cite any incompatibility between the definition and the principle of academic freedom; rather, it stated that the measures already implemented by the university administration to address discrimination were deemed sufficient (Gardiner, 2023). Criticism from Jewish organizations in the country was swift and intense. Jeremy Leibler, president of the Zionist Federation of Australia, accused the university of ignorance (Gardiner, 2023).

From the foregoing, it is now clear that universities in Australia, and not only there (Stern, 2020), have become divided on the issue of defining antisemitism. Those institutions that adopted the definition received praise primarily from Jewish organizations in the country and their corresponding student associations, whereas universities that rejected the definition faced sharp criticism from the same organizations (Stern, 2019), yet appear to have satisfied students who adopt a critical stance toward Israel in the context of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. However, if a definition generates such a degree of division, it is questionable whether it can effectively serve the purpose for which it was adopted: namely, the combatting of antisemitism and discrimination more broadly. It is precisely such reservations that led figures like Kate Aronoff to criticize former U.S. President Donald Trump’s initiative to officially recognize Judaism as a nationality and American Jews as citizens with dual nationality (American and Jewish). Aronoff emphasized that behind such a measure lies an ancient stereotype regarding the purportedly diminished loyalty of Jews to the country in which they reside, framed as protection against antisemitic attacks within university settings where left-leaning student associations critique the policies of the State of Israel regarding the Palestinian issue (Aronoff, 2019). Even Kenneth Stern (2019), the architect of the “working definition” of antisemitism initially adopted by the EUMC, subsequently by the IHRA, and later by the United States, sharply criticized Donald Trump’s initiative to implement this definition at the federal level.

Criticism of the IHRA “working definition” of antisemitism, as well as of the political pressures exerted on universities to adopt this definition, is not limited to Australia, the United States, and Canada. In the United Kingdom, David Feldman, director of the Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism (Birkbeck, University of London), published an article in *The Guardian* in which he sharply criticized both the theoretical soundness of the IHRA definition



and the pressures exerted by the UK Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, in October 2020 on university leaderships to formally adopt the definition through relevant institutional decision. In his article, Feldman argues that the noble goal of limiting and combating antisemitism does not justify the imposition of a problematic definition.

Feldman's critique focuses on two main points: first, the restriction of academic freedom in research and teaching that the adoption of such a definition entails for universities; and second, the consequences of its implementation within the university community itself, affecting both faculty and students, which produce outcomes contrary to those promised—namely, division and conflict among the different groups targeted by racist behaviors, rather than unity and a collective approach to addressing all forms of discrimination (Feldman, 2020). The response from supporters of this definition to Feldman was that the IHRA definition does not take the form of legislation that would compel state authorities to act against those whose behaviors fall within the scope of the definition; rather, it merely serves as a useful tool in the combat against antisemitism.

3.6. Legal expressions of the definition of antisemitism

In the field of institutional expression -legislation and legally binding definitions- there are already IHRA member states that have incorporated provisions into their national legislation, defining as criminal offenses behaviors included within the IHRA's proposed definition of Holocaust-related acts. Austria and Germany are particularly illustrative examples, owing to their historical past. The majority of European Union member states have similarly undertaken legislative initiatives, either through existing provisions in their criminal codes or through the introduction of specific legislation in fulfillment of their obligations under the EU Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA as well as corresponding obligations arising from the European Convention on Human Rights of the Council of Europe.

In Greece, under Law 972/1979, the expression of hatred and discrimination in any form against individuals because of racial, religious, or ethnic background constitutes a criminal offense. Although antisemitism is not explicitly mentioned as a motive for such discrimination or insults, nor is Holocaust denial explicitly criminalized, propaganda that leads to these discriminatory or offensive acts is penalized. Consequently, Holocaust denial, as a form of similar propaganda, has effectively been criminalized since 1979 under a broad interpretation of the law. More recently, Greece has strengthened its relevant legislation to specify the forms of discrimination more rigorously. In the context of combating various forms of racism and xenophobia, as provided for by the 2008 EU Council Framework Decision, the Greek Parliament enacted Law 4285/2014. This law amends the provisions of Law 972/1979 and defines as criminal and prosecutable the following actions. Thus article 1 of the new law stipulates. Beyond the enactment of Law 4285/2014, Law 4619/2019, which modernizes the previous Criminal Code, provides for stricter penalties for racist crimes, focusing particularly on the perpetrator's motivation in the selection of the victim rather than broadly on the existence of hatred.

Law 4285/2014 has faced sharp criticism from various quarters, including historians, academics, and political figures. Critics argue that the law restricts freedom of expression -a paramount value in parliamentary democracies that should only be limited in exceptional cases and certainly not within the realm of teaching and research- and that it could be instrumentalized in ways that undermine established democratic freedoms, thereby producing outcomes contrary to those intended. The first known application of this law did not involve any racist or antisemitic incident, but the German historian Heinz Richter (2011),



with regard to his book *The Battle of Crete* (German title: *Operation Merkur: Die Eroberung der Insel Kreta im Mai 1941*), following complaints from Greek citizens who considered that the text glorified Nazi crimes and war crimes, and therefore fell under the provisions of Law 4285/2014 as the glorification of Nazi crimes. This led to a trial against the author, which ultimately resulted in his acquittal-not on the grounds that the contents of his book did not fall within the scope of the law, but because the court deemed the law itself inconsistent with the Greek Constitution. The Richter case demonstrates that a law enacted to act as a barrier against antisemitism, racism, and xenophobia can be misappropriated and turned in other directions, such as the criminalization of historical research. It also clearly illustrates that racism, antisemitism, and xenophobia in Greece have not been significantly affected by the existence of this law, such that these phenomena have diminished or even remained at stable levels.

4. Conclusive remarks

Recent developments in the Israel-Palestinian conflict have contributed to a reshaping of antisemitic attitudes across Europe. Empirical data from multiple European societies indicate a rise both in antisemitic stereotypes and in everyday incidents targeting Jewish individuals and communal sites (FRA, 2024). Greece reflects this broader trend: the year 2025 alone saw protests against Israeli speakers at cultural events, objections to Israeli tourists on Greek islands, and demonstrations near the Israeli embassy in Athens in response to Israeli military actions in Gaza. Antisemitic attitudes and prejudices in Greece long predate the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas two years ago, following the latter's attack on civilians inside Israeli territory and the abduction of hostages. Internationally renowned Greek political and artistic figures known for their militant stance against Nazism during the German occupation of the country have voiced criticism of the State of Israel for its policies toward Palestine that contained clear antisemitic undertones, particularly in the form of trivialization of the Holocaust (Droumpouki, 2013: 193). But the range and the duration of anti-Israeli protests in Greece after Israel's war against Hamas is something new and unexpected. It raises questions about the role of the education in shaping Greek citizens' Holocaust consciousness and awareness of antisemitic prejudice as well as about teacher education as a socializing agent preparing teachers to sensitize the public about antisemitism. At the same time the range and type of protests against Israeli politics in Gaza sparked a heated public debate over the definition of antisemitism, the legitimacy of political critique against the state of Israel and the boundaries of freedom of speech.

The international discussion over how antisemitism should be defined and by which mechanisms such definitions ought to be institutionalized remains unresolved. Divergent theoretical approaches, along with the varied contexts in which this debate unfolds - encompassing science, politics, advocacy groups, governmental bodies, universities, and institutions such as the European Parliament- have produced a broad and complex field of inquiry focused on a highly contentious subject: Israel-related antisemitism. Although neither scholarly nor societal consensus on the nature and boundaries of this form of antisemitism appears attainable in the immediate future, continued research in this area is essential. Equally important is the systematic dissemination of the results of such research to institutions responsible for teacher education and professional training, where a more nuanced understanding of antisemitism can have significant educational impact.



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