



Institute for
Freedom of Faith
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Conference of
European Rabbis

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Pandemic hate: IFFSE research condemns wave of antisemitism and Islamophobia since Covid outbreak

(Brussels, Monday 18th October 2021) – The Corona pandemic has led to a new wave of antisemitism and Islamophobia online, according to a research study by the [Institute for Freedom of Faith and Security in Europe \(IFFSE\)](#).

Social media companies, including Facebook and Instagram, must do more to combat antisemitism and Islamophobia in the context of the Corona pandemic – the central demand of the authors of the study presented in Brussels on Monday.

Even a year and a half after the beginning of the pandemic in Europe, antisemitic and Islamophobic content is rampant online, criticises the Institute for Freedom of Faith and Security in Europe (IFFSE), an initiative led by the Conference of European Rabbis (CER), in the study.

This has spread especially on social media platforms, repackaging existing anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim narratives and blaming minorities for the pandemic. The study identifies three typical antisemitic and anti-Muslim patterns. Among them, according to the study's author, Hannah Rose, is the conspiratorial narrative that Jews benefited financially from the Corona crisis. Another myth is that Muslims use Corona as a weapon against those of other faiths – for example, they are encouraged by imams to spread the infection through doorknobs.

The IFFSE report states that, despite some efforts, social media platforms have demonstrably not acted sufficiently to effectively prevent the spread of antisemitism and Islamophobia on their platforms. Rather, online conspiracy-theory movements have been successful in attracting new audiences under COVID circumstances. This online hatred has also shown itself offline, according to the IFFSE study – particularly at rallies against Covid-related lockdowns or vaccination campaigns. Resulting from this, faith communities such as Jews and Muslims have come increasingly under threat and are more afraid to live out their faith and way of life in public because of online hate.

Chief Rabbi Goldschmidt, President of the [Conference of European Rabbis \(CER\)](#), warns: *“The path from word to deed is getting shorter and shorter and the danger of becoming a victim of a physical or even fatal attack through hate messages has increased due to the Corona pandemic. Operators of social networks and messenger services still do too little to sufficiently delete ‘fake news’ and hate messages and still offer too large of a platform for conspiracy theorists, Islam haters and antisemites. The transport of hate and crude conspiracy theories must no longer be a profitable business model.”*

During the presentation of the report, Daniel Hoeltgen, Special Representative of the Council of Europe against antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate crimes, said that the commitment of platform operators in this field has so far been half-hearted and that more needs to be done in the area of content moderation. For Illka Salmi, EU Counter-Terrorism Co-ordinator, the contribution of social platform operators is fundamental to effectively address hate speech and hate content. But regulation

is also crucial, he said. *"The European Commission's Digital Service Act is a big step forward in curbing this problem."*

In terms of appropriate countermeasures, the IFFSE's latest report lists recommendations for social networks, for governments and for civil society. For example, antisemitic and Islamophobic content on Facebook should be flagged like Covid fake news. In addition, the platforms should co-operate more closely. This is also against the background that extremists exploit mainstream services by publishing just acceptable content there in order to lure users to more radical websites. States are recommended to punish antisemitic and Islamophobic hate speech online as severely as offline. Civic education should be promoted to make society less vulnerable to misinformation and racist conspiracies.

The report is available [here](#).

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About IFFSE: The newly founded Institute for Freedom of Faith and Security in Europe (IFFSE) is a joint initiative of the Conference of European Rabbis (CER) and brings together Europe's leading thinkers and policymakers to discuss ideas for combating religious extremism and terrorism over here. As an interdisciplinary think tank, the IFFSE aims to strengthen social cohesion, security and tolerance in Europe. This will be achieved through the promotion of peaceful coexistence, integration and positive citizenship; fostering moderate religious practices and safeguarding religious freedoms; mobilising religious leaders to play an active role in improving the security of their communities and countering the abuse of religion; collaborating with governments, civil society and the private sector to combat hate crime, extremism, radicalisation and terrorism both online and offline.

More information on IFFSE: <https://iffse.eu/>

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