

"L'antisemitismo classico e contemporaneo: vecchie e nuove tendenze e come affrontarle. Una riflessione a quasi 85 anni dall'adozione delle Leggi razziali in Italia"

Summary

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Current context – four years have passed since the Cerimonia del Ricordo e delle Scuse of CRUI at the University of Pisa in 2018, which was the last time in which the academic institutions dealt with the issue of antisemitism as a collective. During the years elapsed, many questions arise regarding the ability of societies to deal with hatred, prejudice, the memory of the holocaust and antisemitism. The years of pandemic demonstrated several parallel worrying phenomena: sharp growth in the anti-Semitic discourse in Europe, banalization and trivialization of the Shoah (such as the anti-vax, conspiracy theories etc.), and hostility and hate-speech towards Israel .

The increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric and incidents in other European countries led to a situation that Jewish presence is shrinking and the situation of Jewish students is fragile. It is therefore important to take preventive measures so the state of affairs in Italy will not turn into similar conditions, as we see in other countries.

Right wing and new governments – right wing political parties are on the rise in Europe. While some of these parties express support of the State of Israel, many of these movements also would like to complement or glorify their past, sometimes in apologetic terms for previous criminal acts. Also in Italy, as a new government is in place, a close attention should be made to continue the efforts, which was already made by the previous governments, concerning combating antisemitism.

These circumstances influence also the academic institutions, as well as other factors :

Social media, where one can easily find a variety of hate-speech and extreme contents, is hard to control. The available academic tools or educational programs are perceived as distant or remote from the actual reality on the ground. The available educational tools are not penetrating downstream and cannot effectively create a real change. Regulations on social media and online monitoring does not work effectively, and despite the platforms operators' commitment to delete anti-Semitic content within 24 hours, a new anti-Semitic content is created every 83 seconds.

The regulations over social media are creating a Dark Net that is operating in disguised manner, and enflame radical discourse. A variety of materials for young people is available and has the potential to create a real influence and lead to violent anti-Semitic incidents. In recent years, criminal investigations indicated that among some of the perpetrators of few deadly violent anti-Semitic acts, were all users of the dark net, and got inspiration by similar sources .

Influence of third countries - Campuses around the world are also influenced by the presence of Arab or Muslim financing institutions which are at times, stemming from hostile countries

to Israel, and therefore brings into the campus anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic discourse. Muslim student movements may create anti-Israeli sentiment, which can be expressed in anti-Semitic manner .

The relation between antisemitism and the Palestinian issue - Despite the assumption of parts in society that Antisemitism will fade away or decrease when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be solved, it is important to note that antisemitism was in existence for hundreds of years before the establishment of the State of Israel and the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian tension. It has deep cultural and religious roots, stem from Jewish-Christian history and was developed for reasons, which are unrelated to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. It is likely to assume that antisemitism will continue also after a future solution to the Palestinian issue .

Antisemitism in Italy – CDEC is the official organization that follow anti-Semitic incidents in Italy on daily basis, classify them and record them, and maintain contact with peer organizations around the world that perform similar task. The amount of anti-Semitic incidents in Italy is stable in recent years (approximately 250 incidents a year). The main finding of the last year reveals a sharp rise in the number of anti-Semitic threats that might be related to the political electoral campaigns in recent months. Among Italian society, there is still a high level of prejudice towards Jews.

In Italian campuses – the number of anti-Semitic incidents in Italian universities is very low but, only during the recent year, the Embassy of Israel was informed of several anti-Semitic severe initiatives in different universities. These events were different in nature, but can all be classified as anti-Semitic events. Some were initiated and led by BDS- Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement that get a lot of attention among students. In general, in Italy, there is a growth of hate-speech in academic life .

Operative Recommendations for Rectors:

1. Adoption of IHRA definition

Adopting the IHRA definition and the proposed examples/indicators by inserting them into the universities ethical codes of behavior, with respect for freedom in teaching and research, but linking that freedom to respect for principles of non-discrimination .

This recommendation is one of the main recommendations listed in the National Strategy for combating antisemitism .

In CRUI event in 2018 many rectors agreed that the adoption of the IHRA working definition has an important value. The adoption of this definition is a useful tool and it is based on European experience and collective effort as well as on consensus among all the countries which are part of the IHRA alliance including Italy. The definition includes 11 specific examples which provide a good reference for understanding and classification of anti-Semitic incidents .

For comparison, in the United Kingdom more than 100 universities already adopted the IHRA definition, while in Italy only 1 University did it so far.

2. Encourage research and studies of Antisemitism and Judaism

Develop educational courses specifically devoted to antisemitism in university curricula and in university public and social engagement initiatives. This recommendation is also listed in the National Strategy .

Unfortunately, Ignorance is the main cause of lack of familiarity with Jewish identity, and its unseparated part for centuries, of Italian identity. The academy should deepen this field of study and establish it in an integrated manner .

It is also important to note that antisemitism is changing, evolving and appears in new forms and expressions. The development of education programs, together with history and social studies, including the discussion of stereotypes and prejudices can be an important academic asset for the development of the discipline .

3. Use the available Tools of educational resources:

a. The official website of the Italian Government for the fight against antisemitism:

<https://www.governo.it/it/noantisemitismo/18978>

b. Addressing Conspiracy Theories (UNESCO 2022)

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381958>

c. Against Conspiracy Theories (ODIHR-OSCE 2019)

See pdf attached.

d. Against Holocaust Distortion (IHRA 2022)

<https://www.againstholocaustdistortion.org>

e. Addressing Antisemitism through Education: Teaching Aids (ODIHR 2019)

<https://www.osce.org/odihr/441146>

4. Express clear and vigilant responses

Clarify that freedom of expression cannot allow de-humanization of Jews. The university should allow a space for debate but without strengthening anti-Semitic stereotypes or allow anti-Israeli events that call on boycott or question the right of Israel to exist.

Make sure that all events are held in safety, and prevent probability of likely fragile situations such as provocations or demonstrations against a specific speaker.

Check carefully events which are calling to "Boycott" – which we see clearly from time to time in Italian universities, the call to boycott Israeli speakers, Israeli products, or suspend agreements with Israeli entities.

Enacting surveillance on any limitations on the freedom of expression in academic and university debate for reasons of anti-Semitic prejudice is also one of the recommendations in the National Strategy.

5. Carry out a periodic opinions survey

Carry out a periodic survey on the opinions of students, technical administrative staff ("PTA") and teaching staff in universities to identify the presence or development of discriminatory mentalities. This recommendation appears in the National Strategy.

Although often the assumption is that spreading antisemitism is being done in the level of professors (including some famous cases of Holocaust deniers), it is equivalently important to focus on the students' opinions. As was briefly stated, very often young people are exposed to anti-Semitic content in football clubs and on social media, and on different occasions the source of anti-Semitic acts is among them.

6. Encourage cultural and inter-faith exchange inside campus

As ignorance lead to prejudice, encourage activities which will enable the promotion of Jewish culture, introduction of Jewish events into the general calendar of the campus life, in order to prevent the fertility of hate speech. Encourage local initiatives together with cultural associations, such as for example, "Jewish Culture Week" in order to create involvement and dialogue among the entire body of students.