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Title:

*New Measures to Combat Antisemitism
and Increase Security in Italy*

A number of measures are under way or being planned in Italy to combat antisemitism and online hate speech and to increase security. These are being carried out both by the Government and by government agencies on the Government's instructions. Antisemitism has been for years on their agenda. The most recent measure is a new cooperation agreement signed between Police and Jewish Communities and institutions. *Osservatorio Antisemitismo* of the CDEC Foundation of Milan is the only center on the Italian Peninsula which constantly monitors and researches antisemitism.

It is fully involved with this project and others, both national and international. The *Osservatorio* aims at reinforcing and improving the working methods of daily collection of information about anti-Semitic incidents as well as aspires to a new collaboration with the European Union to combat online hate speech due to its recent dramatic increase.

Good morning, my name is Stefano Gatti, I am a researcher at the CDEC Foundation in Milan, Italy. I would like to thank the Kantor Center for inviting me to this conference, I feel honored to be part of this important event.

The purpose of my paper is to describe, share and discuss with you the antisemitic incidents which have occurred in Italy over the past years, how they are reported, collected and monitored, and which are the measures to combat them and increase security.

Introduction

The CDEC Foundation includes different departments. I work at the *Osservatorio antisemitismo* where data about antisemitic incidents occurred in Italy are daily collected, compiled, monitored and studied. *Osservatorio* is the only center on the Italian Peninsula which constantly monitors and researches antisemitism.

Osservatorio classifies an antisemitic incident as any malicious act aimed at Jewish people, organizations or property, where there is evidence that the victim or victims were targeted because they are (or are believed to be) Jewish.

Incidents can take several forms, including physical attacks on people or property, verbal or written abuse, or antisemitic leaflets, posters or graffiti. It is indisputable that in the last years there has been a worrisome increase in online incidents.

Osservatorio does not trawl the internet looking for online incidents to log. It only records those incidents (antisemitic comments posted on social media, messaging services, blogs or internet forums etc.) that are reported by a

member of the public who fulfills the role of victim or witness, and where either the offender or the victim are based in Italy.

IMAGE 2

Antisemitic incidents are reported to *Osservatorio* in a number of ways, most commonly by mail, by the *Osservatorio* website and by phone, in particular, through the 24hour hotline **Antenna Antisemitismo**. It is a facility established to record and analyze reports (voiced by phone or by mail) of antisemitic incidents.

Paper

With the advent of the Internet and of web 2.0, antisemitic messages and expressions are disseminated more quickly and widely than before, and often go unchallenged. The majority of disseminators ignore critical responses. Others double-down on their hateful messages and attack those who question or criticize their antisemitic posts. **Antisemitism has become normalized and harassment is a daily occurrence.** Even more troubling, antisemitic messages often include incitement to violence.

The major providers have become more attentive to the problem of hate on Internet and more effective in erasing the contents of hatred. Still, Internet remains the privileged place for the dissemination of hate speech. Numerous sites function around the clock to advance racial hatred, preaching white supremacy, classical antisemitism, and more violence-inspiring prejudice, all of which, not ineptly, have been suggestively lumped together under the label of "Hate."

IMAGE 3

Let's have a look at the table which shows the totals of antisemitic incidents reported in years 2017, 2018 and first ten months of year 2019.

ANTISEMITIC INCIDENT NUMBERS

	2019	2018	2017
January	23	14	13
February	22	13	10
March	17	8	3
April	26	24	8
May	26	24	10
June	20	25	10
July	21	20	19
August	13	14	4
September	22	13	14
October	19	16	9
Total (10 months)	209	171	100
November		13	21
December		13	9
TOTAL (12 months)		197	130

You can see that the rise of antisemitic incidents in 2019 continues the sustained period of historically high incidents totals recorded by *Osservatorio* over the past three years. I'm going to elaborate quickly on year 2017 and 2018, then I'll move onto the first ten months of 2019.

Osservatorio recorded 197 antisemitic incidents across Italy in 2018, a significantly higher number compared to 2017 when 130 were recorded (which is + 66%). No instances of physical assault nor proven cases of discrimination were reported.

133 of the 197 incidents reported in 2018 occurred online: 70 on Facebook, 25 Twitter, 9 YouTube, 28 Websites, 1 WhatsApp.

IMAGE 4

Now let's look at this table which shows the incident categories of the first ten months of 2019

INCIDENT CATEGORIES (first ten months of 2019)

1	Online antisemitism	145
2	Verbal abuse	23
3	Graffiti and imagery	18
4	Threats	8
5	Mass media	5
6	Acts of vandalism	3
7	Banalization of the Shoah	3
8	Discrimination	2
9	Physical attacks	2
	TOTAL	209

I'm going to talk briefly about some of the categories and then I'll proceed with an in-depth analysis of the antisemitic incidents.

First of all: 65 of the 209 incidents recorded in the first 10 months of 2019 were reported by members of Italian Jewish Communities.

- *Osservatorio* recorded **145 antisemitic online incidents** – **number one** in the table – across Italy in the first ten months of 2019.

This number illuminates the reality that antisemitic mails, tweets and posts, platforms and forums have been dramatically increasing in the last years and

continue to flourish as fertile ground for public and visible expressions of antisemitism. Social media in particular has proven an essential and convenient vessel, through which those who wish to harass, abuse and threaten Jewish individuals and institutions, as well as those who simply wish to disseminate their prejudice, are able to express their antisemitism. They use a tasteless and violent language and often components from the old arsenal of antisemitic devices, imagery, and references. Stereotypical tropes about Jewish people's power, influence, money, and exaggerating or inventing the tragedies of the Shoah are present in online expressions of antisemitism.

These totals are neither able nor aiming to communicate the actual amount of antisemitic content that is generated and spread on social media. An accurate figure would be of course impossible to quantify given the vast array of material posted and platforms across which it is circulated.

It is not always easy to ascertain the ethnicity, gender and age of antisemitic incident offenders. Those who commit antisemitic offences online may choose to completely anonymise themselves, which makes it almost impossible to garner any information about the person behind the abuse. Offenders are, in most cases, adults, whose age and gender is, as said, not always so easy to identify. Unfortunately, there are also many young perpetrators, sometimes they are minors.

There are some "random" haters, in other words those who post antisemitic contents only when issues relating to Jews and antisemitism are prominent in news and politics. Disseminators of the most influential antisemitic messages in terms of reach and re-posting tend to post such content regularly, peaking during relevant current events involving Jews or Israel. These online

perpetrators tirelessly and obsessively post and share anti-Jewish material which culminates in campaigns against Jewish public figures and institutions. Antisemitic powerful message and rhetoric are often made up of simple words and catchy slogans to appeal to a mindset formed by prejudice and distorted images of the Jew, thus bringing distinct social and political groups together.

If some people use the protective power of anonymity over a variety of social media platforms to spread harmful or misleading content about Jews, some others express openly their antisemitic ideas. The antisemitic “Italian cyberspace” includes journalists (like Giulietto Chiesa, Paolo Di Mizio, Claudio Messori, Maurizio Blondet), essayists (like Paolo Sensi and Mauro Biglino), professors (like Antonio Caracciolo and Emanuele Castrucci), columnists which, via social media and video blog, disseminate antisemitic propaganda.

- Let's move to **number three**. *Osservatorio* recorded **18** antisemitic graffiti and imagery incidents

Among the reported incidents, two are quite worrisome. The offenders punctuated their abuse with antisemitic imagery that poses a threat: a *Maghen David* (the star of David) was spray-painted on a wall next to the shop of a Jewish trader in Leghorn and some swastikas on the intercom of a Jewish couple of Rome (he is a rabbi and the wife a teacher).

- **Number 7**: *Osservatorio* recorded 3 incidents related to the Banalization of the Shoah.

IMAGINE 5

Osservatorio recorded several reports about bottles with neonazis labels. They are for sale in a market of Lido di Jesolo (a touristic site on the Adriatic coast, not far from Venice). This deeply-rooted phenomenon, spread across the whole Peninsula (especially on touristic sites), shocks foreign tourists – in particular American and Israeli – who do not understand how these products are available for sale.

- **Number 8:** Discrimination, 2 incidents

This is a BDS campaign promoted by the Italian branch of one of the major international anti-Zionist organizations.

The rise of antisemitic incidents recorded from January until October 2019 seems to have (except for the first three months) no connection with any specific, prominent issue in news and politics relating to Jews. If the incidents recorded during the first quarter of the year occurred at a time when the *Day of Remembrance* was celebrated, over the following seven-month period (April-October), although no specific issues had risen, *Osservatorio* recorded a surge in incidents, in particular verbal abuses directed at Jewish individuals.

Antisemitic allegations include a wide array of **conspiracy theories** which blame Jews for many problems for which they bear no responsibility. This issue has crystallized around a series of clichés – prominent in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* – purportedly describing the Jewish plan for global domination. It also targets the straw man stereotype of Jews as bankers in control of the world's economies, manipulators of public opinion abusing mass media, and oppressors of independent nations' free potential. This stereotype arsenal has diversified by adding a series of new characters

(Zionism, the American Jewish lobby, and so on) and also movements like the “No Vax”.

IMAGINE 6

“No Vax”, called in Italian “antivaccinismo”, is a movement against mandatory vaccination policies. It considers vaccinations the cause of disabling injuries. Antisemitic social media and platforms insist on this issue and gain consensus which percolates in and also outside the antisemitic “Cyberspace”. “No Vax” movement claims also that Jews like Soros and Rothschild promote “vaccinismo” and spread cancer. This kind of antisemitism is expressed not in violence, but in the charade of nonviolence. It is in fact constructed upon a perverse interpretation of human rights in which the Jew as poisoner reappears as a human rights-violator.

IMAGINE 7

From the incidents reported to *Osservatorio*, Facebook (with 63 incidents) appears to be the favoured web-based ground for spreading antisemitic hatred. Websites (44), Twitter (14), YouTube (5), Google Plus (1), Instagram (1), WhatsApp (2), Mail (7), VK (1).

Online and offline worst onslaughts come, usually, from far right extremist groups, Neonazis *in primis* and Antizionists pro BDS.

This year an accelerating, alarming trend of antisemitic incidents occurred in schools: they were verbal abuses directed at Jewish students, online trivialization of the Shoah, antisemitic offences posted on Facebook by teachers.

Let's move now to the measures to combat antisemitism

In a world riddled with cyberhate, online harassment, and misuses of technology, one of the main problems is to counter online antisemitism through legal means. Although the Italian Postal Police is one of the most efficient in the world in monitoring online hate, there is no specific law in the Italian system that punishes or imposes sanctions on online antisemitism and racism. Hence, the way to shut down hate sites is quite arduous and challenging. Many antisemitic sites register their hosting in the United States where everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression or in countries where antisemitism and Holocaust denial are not considered a crime. It is therefore impossible to intervene on the provider to shut down the site. In theory, following the regulations about *Hate Speech*, social networks should not permit to upload antisemitic and racist themes, but in practice this almost never happens. Although the main websites and social networks have regulations against online hate and bullying, by and large antisemitism and racism are condemned and punished only when they arise and manifest as incitement to hate. Holocaust denial and anti-Zionism – two of the most widespread online antisemitic *topoi* – are not included among the “hate speech” policy of the main social networks.

The spread and amplification of antisemitic messages on social media and the Internet, and its rise in recent years has worried The Union of the Italian Jewish Communities (Ucei). Same worries are shared also by Italian Government on whose agenda Antisemitism has been for quite some years. Combating antisemitism has become in Italy a priority, in particular for the National Police.

Osservatorio has an information sharing agreement (signed in April 2019) with Ucei Security Department and OSCAD (which is the Police department for protection against discrimination acts) which allows *Osservatorio* to share antisemitic incidents reports so that they can glean as complete a picture as possible of the number and nature of reported antisemitic incidents.

The aim is to monitor antisemitism, to combat it and to train police force. I'll give you some examples. A special calendar has been provided to the National Police: it underlines some sensitive dates, meaning the dates on which celebrations or commemorations of the State of Israel or Jewish events take place, as they are regularly subject to antisemitic abuse. The calendar also indicates dates on which some individuals are celebrated by Neo-nazis or far right extremists (birthday of Hitler, death of sheik Yasin, etc.). Soon some training courses on antisemitism will be provided to Police forces to correctly identify antisemitic content, to expose extremism, to deliver anti-bias education, etc. Moreover, an instruction book showing antisemitic slogans, imagery, etc. as well as a handbook on antisemitism will be provided.

Osservatorio works productively with National Police. The collaboration with the Police has proved increasingly valuable.

IMAGINE 8

A new report-form has been recently released to be used in case of serious antisemitic incidents. If a member of an Italian Jewish community reports a harmful incident, he or she fills in the form with the details about the incident. Then the victim shares it with *Osservatorio* and Ucei Security department. The form is then submitted to OSCAD.

IMAGINE 9

Reports can also be sent via the Application *WhatsApp Octopus Osservatorio*, Ucei Security department and OSCAD are always in touch, sharing information and data during meetings and via *WhatsApp*. *Osservatorio* publishes quarterly reports which include reported antisemitic incidents.

I would like to conclude by saying that *Osservatorio* is involved with national and international projects.

Close collaboration with other institutions is necessary to combat antisemitism on social media as well as reinforce and improve the working methods of daily collection of information about antisemitic incidents. In Italy *Osservatorio* works together with Università Statale of Milan and Università Cattolica of Milan: we share projects and surveys, as well analysis of antisemitic contents and their disseminators which provide us with additional background information to use in the development of new strategies to combat antisemitism online. Some projects – aimed at elaborating counter-narratives which expose and contrast false accusations, conspiracy theories, prejudices and negative sentiments against Jews – complement these efforts to reduce the negative impact of antisemitic messages that are not taken down.

Osservatorio aspires also to a new collaboration with the European Union to combat online hate speech due to its recent dramatic increase. In connection with the global and European relevance of the phenomenon, *Osservatorio* has recently applied to some European Union calls. Its proposals aim at defining innovative strategies, in collaboration with Italian and European partners, to put in place a series of educational activities as well as online actions in order to tackle antisemitism in a pan European perspective.

THANK YOU