

# EXPERT CONSULTATION ON COUNTERING HATE SPEECH

through Interfaith  
Cooperation and  
Multi-Stakeholder  
Partnership

 FINDINGS



KAICIID DIALOGUE CENTRE

European Council of Religious Leaders

 Religions for Peace

20 APRIL 2021  
14:00-17:00 CEST  
ZOOM

## PART OF THE SOCIAL COHESION INITIATIVE: CAPACITY BUILDING WORK WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO EFFECTIVELY COUNTER HATE SPEECH



### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hate speech is a serious problem in Europe. COVID-19 has resulted in social isolation and scepticism towards the establishment and experts, building on already fragile economic stresses, extreme political discourse, and growing social and political disenfranchisement among vulnerable sections of society. This has led to a marked increase in hate speech, hate crime, incitement to violence and discrimination against religious and other minorities. Many European societies have suffered the consequences of this trend. Austria and France witnessed terror attacks (Vienna, November 2020 and Nice, October 2020) while the numbers of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate crimes rose and far-right extremist groups and networks gained strength.

Tackling the problem effectively is complex and requires long-term engagement to stop the cycle of alienation. There are challenges identifying, monitoring, reporting and gathering data on hate speech, bringing to light the need for information campaigns, education and a review of the accessibility of civil institutions. Regulations, sanctions and criminal and civil legislation against hate speech are essential to control this phenomenon, and these must be balanced with safeguarding the fundamental, complementary but sometimes-conflicting freedoms of expression, religion and belief in European societies. In this context, the International Dialogue

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Centre (KAICIID) and the European Council for Religious Leaders/Religions for Peace Europe (ECRL/RfP Europe), with the support of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), organized this Consultation to explore the role of interreligious, intercultural and cross-sector collaboration in the prevention of hate speech.

Religious and belief actors, including religious leaders, are essential collaborators for policymakers and other civil society organizations seeking to address the drivers of hate speech. Religious and community leaders are often sources of influence and moral/ethical leadership in their communities. They can speak out against hate speech, and by standing with other communities that have been victims of hate speech, they can demonstrate interfaith solidarity in a very real sense. Dialogue between and among religious communities also provides a space for societies to learn about themselves and each other as different beliefs and practices exist side-by-side. Since ignorance and the resulting fear are a prime motive for hate speech and discrimination, dialogue can provide a defense.

The recommendations in this report highlight the role of religious communities and interreligious and intercultural dialogue in the following aspects:

1. **Defining** the factors that are conducive to the spread of hate speech, and finding reliable ways to record and document it;
2. **Promoting** awareness of the value of diversity and pluralism to democratic societies, and of the consequences of hate speech on communities;
3. **Supporting** and counseling victims of hate speech, both collectively and individually;
4. **Encouraging** community leaders and members to develop the skills to identify hate speech, recognise misinformation and disinformation and speak out authoritatively against hate speech in their midst.

*“The word of a human being has tremendous power to build and to destroy, to give and take life. It was Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Elie Wiesel who said that the gas chambers in Auschwitz were not built by bricks but by words; it was through a long process of a de-humanization of Jews in Germany.”*

**CHIEF RABBI PINCHAS GOLDSCHMIDT,**  
President of the Conference  
of European Rabbis

## MAIN FINDINGS

The Expert Consultation on Countering Hate Speech through Interfaith Cooperation and Multi-stakeholder Partnership in Europe was organized by the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) and the European Council of Religious Leaders/Religions for Peace Europe (ECRL/RfP Europe), with support from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on 20 April 2021. The issue of hate speech in Europe was addressed by 18 speakers and moderators and some 70 participants, representing European intergovernmental organizations, religious, policy, civil society and faith-based institutions – all of which are currently tackling the issue of hate speech in Europe. The Consultation provided participants with the space to learn about one another’s initiatives and share lessons learned and recommendations. A summary of the event has been published on KAICIID’s website here. This document summarises the main findings of this Consultation.

## Why hate speech has become such a major concern

The organizers of the Consultation were motivated by the rising occurrences of hate speech across Europe, and the recognition that religious actors and other civil society organizations play an important role in its prevention as well as in steering communities towards greater resilience, connectedness and solidarity with one another. While hate speech is a long-standing issue, in recent years, the polarisation of societies and politics has caused a rise in xenophobia and racism that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of religious minorities have been targeted, especially where they also possess other potentially vulnerable characteristics (for example, being a woman, a refugee or a person of colour). Ef-

forts to limit hate speech through regulation and legal means must negotiate a fine balance between protecting the status of freedom of speech as a cornerstone of European democracies, and defending the rights of minorities and victims of hate speech. The definition of – and therefore the legal measures to address – hate speech vary widely among European countries, often reflecting specific historical and cultural contexts. This disparity of approaches also finds expression in the lack of a comprehensive monitoring system for hate speech. The use of social media to propagate and mainstream harmful stereotypes and hate speech, often by influential public figures, tends to add to the difficulty of controlling and preventing this trend.

Four key lessons were learned from the contributions of various speakers:



- 1 **Words are powerful.** There is continued evidence of the link between hate speech and acts of violence, particularly when inflammatory language comes from authoritative figures such as politicians.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, hate speech has an impact that goes beyond its direct victims; it is a symptom of something more profound that shakes the roots of social solidarity in Europe, the belief in a diverse but cohesive society and the tenets of democracy and human rights.



- 2 **Social media** *“has to some extent become a menace to the lives of many minorities”* – Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt. Social media is increasingly used as a channel for discriminatory attacks against religious and other vulnerable minorities. The anonymity afforded by social media platforms and the difficulties of regulating content online make this a particular area of concern. Furthermore, victims of online hate speech often do not have standing to seek redress.



- 3 **Populist tendencies in politics** have brought about a polarisation of the European political scene and its discourse in recent years. Certain political parties combine strong criticism of “outside groups” (for example, immigrants or religious minorities) with antagonism toward “political correctness” and cast doubt on scientific methods and the mainstream media. With racism and xenophobia being expressed openly by influential policymakers, tolerance for extreme rhetoric has grown and hate speech has become normalised and part of mainstream discourse.



- 4 **The COVID-19 pandemic** has exacerbated insecurity, isolation, and fear. As with other global crises, such as economic recessions, the pandemic has resulted in increased stereotyping, scapegoating and stigmatisation based on identity. But COVID-19 has also produced “ideal” conditions for the propagation of hate speech. People are spending more time online and are being influenced by the scapegoating of particular communities or conspiracy theories involving others (for example anti-Semitic tropes). Religious communities and their observances have been blamed for the spread of COVID-19 and discrimination toward them, compounded by socioeconomic factors, has created real and frightening discrimination and exclusion.

<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe (n.d.), Hate speech and violence. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/hate-speech-and-violence>; Piazza, J. (28 September 2020). When politicians use hate speech, political violence increases. The Conversation. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/when-politicians-use-hate-speech-political-violence-increases-146640>

“What we refer to as hate speech is a problem of long-standing and recent intensification in Europe, though targets have been many and varied [...] Findings suggest that hatemongers, including organized hate groups as well as individuals, have exploited conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic to spread hate speech. Through the digital space they are also able to reach more people than ever before. Harmful stereotypes and tropes are also chronically reinforced by mainstream media, powerful politicians and some religious leaders as well as the influences of popular culture and academic discourse. Any efforts to address this phenomenon must address the fact that hate speech is now part of mainstream discourse.”

DR. KISHAN MANOCHA,  
Head of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination at OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

## Key challenges faced by those working to counter hate speech in Europe

The contributions to the Expert Consultation outlined several challenges that hamper the success of countering hate speech in Europe:

1. **Preventive measures can often be ad hoc.** Hate speech is a multifaceted problem with roots in intolerance, racism, and bigotry. Tackling it effectively requires addressing the root causes of social fractures, and prevention is needed at every stage in the cycle. Efforts to do so tend to be fragmented and symptom-focused rather than comprehensive.
2. **Balancing the widespread nature of the problem with contextual specificities.** While hate speech is a problem with boundaries, tackling the root causes and expressions require understanding of local, cultural, religious and traditional contexts. Initiatives tend, due to resource and expertise constraints, to focus on one to the exclusion of the others.
3. **Lack of sustained collaboration.** A lack of sustained cooperation and respectful relations between different stakeholders impedes efficient cooperation and trust and contributes to a sense among religious groups of only being called upon when needed to implement political goals.
4. **A lack of sufficient and differentiated data.** Hate speech is not always sufficiently reported or recorded; people do not know how, when or where to report such incidents and data gathered is inconsistent.
5. **Intra- and inter-group dynamics within religious communities.** Religious communities can often be originators of hate speech against religious minorities and other groups, including their own members. Members of religious communities who speak out against hate speech often find themselves the target of discrimination, harassment or exclusion.
6. **Skills gap.** A lack of Internet literacy and clarity concerning legal boundaries contribute to hate speech being spread, sometimes unwittingly, within religious communities. Community and religious leaders often lack the digital knowledge and training to act quickly when a response/action is needed.



## Priority areas for future action and recommendations on how to improve interventions on countering hate speech

Based on the challenges discussed above, the speakers and participants of the Consultation also put forward suggestions to improve initiatives to counter hate speech in Europe:

1. **Improve understanding of hatred** and the boundaries between freedom of expression and hate speech. This can be done through analysis of hatred among different population groups. It is key to be vigilant concerning ulterior motives for hate speech (such as political gain or recruiting a certain group by stoking fear about another).
2. **Encourage cross-sector collaboration** and sustained dialogue between policymakers and religious actors to build up trust, communication skills and understanding of the sectors' respective needs and priorities.
3. **Use rights-based approaches to countering hate speech** with human rights and human dignity at their core, which deal thoughtfully with freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and the guidance of the European legal framework concerning proportionality.
4. **Prioritise victims' rights to restorative justice and healing** through legal and community-led measures.
5. **Educate against hatred** so that people recognise it and know how to respond adequately. This can be done by improving critical thinking and reading skills, exploring counter or alternative narratives, and encouraging recognition of a plurality of identities.
6. **Encourage reporting** and improve recording of hate speech to enable the access to remedies (this implies providing guidance on where and how to report incidents of hatred with appropriate recording systems in place).
7. **Systematically monitor hate speech** and gather disaggregated data (e.g. identifying minorities, members of religious or vulnerable groups) to ensure no dimension of discrimination is being inadvertently ignored.
8. **Prosecute individuals for hate speech** to ensure offenders are held to account and provide support to victims and ensure their rights are respected.
9. **Hold states and large corporations accountable** for any hate speech that occurs within their remit or on their platforms. European Union member states should consider how to apply the Digital Service Act proposed by the European Commission.
10. **Governments should withdraw support** from any organization that encourages hate speech.
11. Initiatives to counter hate speech need to **address gender**, as women are more susceptible to sexist and gender-based hate, and **address an inter-generational spectrum** when generating understanding and support.
12. Initiatives to counter hate speech online need to **pay attention to timing** when responding to hate storms online. Introducing a counternarrative 24 hours after an incident appears to have the best results (before and feelings are too strong; after and it may be too late to have maximum impact).

## Recommendations specifically for religious actors

In addition to the general recommendations, the speakers and participants of the Consultation also produced recommendations specifically for religious actors and their role in initiatives to counter hate speech in Europe:

1. **Maintain interreligious or interfaith dialogue.** Build a foundation of intercommunity solidarity through interreligious encounters on a sustained basis. Religious and belief leaders may be able to provide an influential example of mutual respect which will build up resilience to hate and hateful narratives and provide a framework for interreligious support in times of crisis.
2. **Take a firm and public stance condemning hate speech wherever and whenever it occurs.** For example, calling on political actors and parties to uphold their codes of conduct and democratic principles.
3. **Engage in internal and external monitoring.** This can be important in protecting community buildings and members from attacks. In addition, sensitivity toward hate speech can help make sure that texts and discourse are not manipulated to encourage hate towards other groups, and will enable people to recognise and deal with hate speech when it occurs within the communities.
4. **Showcase examples of scripture and tradition that foster conciliatory messages.** Emphasise the importance of language and using it responsibly, as well as open and forgiving attitudes, drawing on theological evidence.
5. **Train and support those within religious communities who deal with communications and social media** to encourage positive and clear messaging and provide strategies for constructively curating conversations online when they take an aggressive turn.

## Existing Initiatives and Resources

During the Consultation, several important resources were shared as best practices that can be taken as examples for the work of others. In the following, a short overview is provided:

- 1 **United Religions Initiative (URI)** practices “kind speech” and how to respond effectively when countering hate speech, providing useful materials: <https://www.uri.org/who-we-are/cooperation-circle/talking-back-hate-standing-peace-resource-cc>
- 2 **ECRI General Policy Recommendation N°15 on Combating Hate Speech** – adopted on 8 December 2015: <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-general-policy-recommendation-no-15-on-combating-hate-speech/16808b5b01>
- 3 **ECRI** – two general policy recommendations on anti-Semitism and against Muslim-hatred are currently being revised and expected at the end of 2021.
- 4 **The OSCE ODIHR's Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-Discrimination:** A Practical Guide can be found here: <https://www.osce.org/odihhr/385017>
- 5 **The Finnish Ministry of Education has included recognition of hate speech in school curricula:** [https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/75432/Meaningful\\_in\\_Finland.pdf](https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/75432/Meaningful_in_Finland.pdf)

- 6 **In Berlin, the Kreuzberg Initiative** was started by intellectuals aiming to stop the spread of anti-Semitism, for example, through the arrival of migrants: [https://www.kiga-berlin.org/index.php?page=ueber-uns&hl=en\\_US](https://www.kiga-berlin.org/index.php?page=ueber-uns&hl=en_US)
- 7 **The Council of Europe's No Hate Speech Movement** (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/no-hate-campaign>) was launched in 2013 and is a youth campaign led by the Council of Europe Youth Department seeking to mobilise young people to combat hate speech and promote human rights online.
- 8 **European Interfaith Youth Network of Religions for Peace Europe** launched the "ALterHate" initiative, which aims to establish an alternative narrative to address hate: <https://www.facebook.com/ALternate.Hate>
- 9 **The 2020 Muslim World League**, in cooperation with UPEACE, launched a book on tackling hate speech, and is currently preparing a second volume which will incorporate a human rights dimension (due to be launched in June 2021 in Brussels): <https://www.upeace.org/files/Publications/Promoting%20peace%2C%20human%20rights%20and%20dialogue%20among%20civilizations.pdf>
- 10 **The Safe Haven Training Programme** is aimed at community organizations and educates members of different faiths on what hate crimes are and how to react and respond to them: <https://safehavenministries.org/certification/>
- 11 **A Digital Service Act** has been proposed by the European Commission which foresees clear liability for Internet platforms if they allow hate speech to be distributed: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act-ensuring-safe-and-accountable-online-environment\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act-ensuring-safe-and-accountable-online-environment_en)
- 12 **The Conference of European Rabbis** issued a manifesto against religious extremism including the recommendation for monitoring of religious texts to prevent manipulation <https://agilesites.co.uk/cer/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Manifesto.pdf>
- 13 **With a specific focus on online hate speech:**
  - **"I am here international"** is "a world citizens' network, with more than 150,000 members in 14 countries, which promotes, defends and upholds freedom of speech and democracy through counter-speech on social media to stop the spread of hate speech" <https://iamhereinternational.com/who-we-are/>
  - **"Get the trolls out!"** is a linguistic self-defence guide against anti-Semitism <https://getthetrollsout.org/>
  - **INACH network "Bringing the Online In Line with Human Rights"** provides free online training on how to consume news and media more critically, what hate speech is, why it is dangerous, and methods used to conduct counter-speech <https://counterspeech.inach.net/training/login>
  - **A project on Communication Rights** by the European Region of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC Europe): [http://www.waccurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/00\\_WACC\\_Breaking\\_Down\\_Social\\_Media\\_Divides\\_Full.pdf](http://www.waccurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/00_WACC_Breaking_Down_Social_Media_Divides_Full.pdf)

## Conclusion

This Consultation concluded that, to be effective, efforts to counter hate speech must encompass a multi-stakeholder approach, including both religious and secular partners and stakeholders. Approaches must be multi-dimensional – for example: addressing structural racism, discrimination and inequalities; acknowledging suppression and resistance to legislation; looking to social media platforms to implement better and nuanced censorship; defining hate speech; holding governments to account; and supporting advocacy on the part of religious leaders. Positive counternarratives are needed to respond to hate speech but they must be strategic and delivered through the right technologies at the right time. Countering hate speech initiatives will not be successful unless the context is fully recognised. There are some existing tools that provide good context analysis but they need to be disseminated more widely; all actors need better data to understand the causes behind hate speech in order to structure their initiatives and for approaches to have maximum impact.

## ANNEX 1: AGENDA OF EXPERT CONSULTATION ON 20 APRIL 2021

TIME	ACTIVITY
14:00-14:10	<p><b>GREETINGS AND WELCOME:</b>  <b>H.E. Faisal bin Muaammar</b>, Secretary General of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)</p> <p><b>INPUT SPEECH:</b>  <b>Rev. Dr. theol. Thomas Wipf</b>, President of the European Council of Religious Leaders/Religions for Peace Europe (ECRL/RfP Europe)</p>
14:10-14:25	<p><b>KEYNOTE SPEECH: "United actions of religious leaders and policymakers to prevent hate speech"</b>  <b>Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt</b>, President of the Conference of European Rabbis</p> <p><b>KEYNOTE SPEECH: "Addressing hate speech in Europe – reflections on the role of religious and belief actors and leaders and the importance of human rights-centred, multi-actor responses"</b>  <b>Dr. Kishan Manocha</b>, Head of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination at OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)</p>
14:25-15:10	<p><b>MODERATED DISCUSSION: "Current initiatives to prevent hate speech in Europe"</b>  European actors are showing an increasing interest in hate speech, identifying it as both a harbinger and exacerbator of greater social problems (loss of trust, discrimination and sometimes violence) and recognising that stopping it may be crucial to halting the social compartmentalisation and intolerance that has spiked in recent years. Their efforts include campaigns to raise awareness, building capacity and bringing about policies and laws that address the issue while protecting essential freedoms. With religious minority communities strongly affected by hate speech, cross-sector collaboration can be a challenging but important approach. The first panel will enquire into current developments to curb hate speech in different contexts across Europe. Participants will have the opportunity to underline why hate speech is increasingly singled out as a target for intervention, how current events have affected it, and what methods programmes are using to tackle and prevent it. From the perspective both of organizations running such initiatives and from those of community actors facing the problem at the grassroots, participants will be invited to identify what is working and what is not, and what is needed so that more can be done effectively in partnership.</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>Dr. Elizabeta Kitanovic</b>, Executive Secretary for Human Rights at the Conference of European Churches (CEC)</p> <p><b>SPEAKERS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dr. Kiran Bali</b>, MBE JP, Chair of the United Religions Initiative (URI) Global Council of Trustees</li> <li>• <b>Chief Rabbi Schlomo Hofmeister</b>, Community Rabbi of Vienna</li> <li>• <b>Prof. Maria Marouda</b>, Chair of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Suaad Onniselkä</b>, Assistant Rector of the City of Helsinki Education and Training Authority</li> <li>• <b>Amb. David Fernandez Puyana</b>, Permanent Observer at the United Nations University for Peace (UPEACE) to the United Nations in Geneva</li> </ul>
15:10-15:30	<p><b>Q&amp;A with small breakout groups and then plenary with sharing of discussions</b></p>



TIME	ACTIVITY
15:30-15:40	BREAK
15:40-16:25	<p><b>MODERATED DISCUSSION: “Efforts dealing with the effects of hate speech”</b></p> <p>Hate speech undermines several of the most fundamental tenets of European law and citizen’s rights, including human dignity, non-discrimination, equality, and participation in public life. It can result in the harm of individuals, including psychological distress, damage to self-esteem, inhibited self-fulfilment, or fear and intimidation. The extent of the damage may depend on the spread and authority of the sources and the vulnerability of the group defined by the targeted characteristic. When hate speech becomes mainstreamed in national discourse among policy makers, whole communities may feel or may actually become ostracised.</p> <p>Some types of hate speech may be best dealt with via criminal measures, others by educational, cultural, informational and other non-regulatory means. In some areas, the collaboration of policymakers and civil society actors with religious leaders can substantially contribute to countering hate speech sensitively and effectively. Of particular importance for this panel is identifying initiatives, best practices and lessons learned in Europe which have enabled successful engagement after hate speech has occurred – in (re)building trust, confidence and new norms – and particularly what factors lead to successful collaboration between religious actors and policymakers in the long term.</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b></p> <p><b>Ms. Nayana Jayarajan</b>, Deputy Director of Communications at the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ms. Alessandra Coppola</b>, Vice Coordinator of the No Hate Speech Movement, Italy</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Christie J. Edwards</b>, JD, LLM, Deputy Head of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination at the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Emina Frljak</b>, Board Member of the European Interfaith Youth Network of Religions for Peace Europe</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Daniel Höltgen</b>, Council of Europe Special Representative on Antisemitic and Anti-Muslim Hatred and Hate Crimes</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Henri Nickels</b>, Policy Coordinator, Institutional Cooperation and Networks Unit, EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)</li> </ul>
16:25-16:45	Q&A with small breakout groups and then plenary with sharing of discussions
16:45-16:55	<p><b>IDENTIFY THE MAIN FINDINGS AND CLOSURE:</b></p> <p><b>Dr. Mark Owen</b>, Secretary General of the European Council of Religious Leaders/Religions for Peace Europe (ECRL/RfP Europe)</p>
16:55-17:00	CLOSE AND NEXT STEPS



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