

EU Parliament votes in favor of adopting antisemitism definition

Washington, D.C., June 1 – The European Parliament has adopted a resolution calling on European Union member states and European Union institutions to adopt and apply the working definition of antisemitism used by the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA). The text of the resolution further urges EU member states to “protect their Jewish citizens and Jewish institutions from hate crime and hate speech; support law enforcement efforts to identify and prosecute anti-Semitic attacks...[and] appoint national coordinators on combating antisemitism.” The Louis D. Brandeis Center has urged this action throughout Europe and North America and applauds this more.

“This is an important step, not only for the countries of Europe, but for everyone who is concerned about rising anti-Semitism and its deleterious impact on academic institutions and Jewish civil liberties,” stated Kenneth L. Marcus, president of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, who has been traveling in Europe and meeting with European authorities in and out of the European Parliament this week. “This decision will send a clear message about the need for a similar definition to be adopted in the United States.”

The IHRA definition, initially adopted in May of 2016, has been rapidly gaining ground in Europe. Three European nations, Romania, Austria, and the United Kingdom, have all adopted the definition into their corpus of law. Earlier this week, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), a division of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), incorporated the IHRA definition into its important new guide, “Understanding Anti-Semitic Hate Crimes and Addressing the Security Needs of Jewish Communities.” Marcus commented, “To have the European Parliament adopt the IHRA definition on the same week that ODIHR incorporates it into their work demonstrates an extraordinary show of momentum. The IHRA definition is substantially similar to the State Department definition, which Congress and some of the states have been considering adopting as well.”

In December 2016, the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act (AAA) was introduced to the U.S. Congress. The AAA would have required the U.S. Department of Education to use the State Department’s definition in evaluating intent of anti-Semitic incidents on campuses. The AAA bill, which passed the Senate unanimously in December of last year, did not have a chance to be voted on in the House before the legislative session ended. The senators responsible for the bill plan on reintroducing it in the current session. The adoption of the definition by the European Parliament, as well as the increasing number of individual European countries adopting it, gives further momentum to such efforts.

Several U.S. states have also, individually, begun the process of drafting legislation aimed at adopting the definition in their own governments. South Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee are all considering similar moves. Marcus commented, “This is truly a global movement to combat the resurgence of anti-Semitism using the best available tools. In

adopting the IHRA definition, the European Union makes it easier for governmental authorities to identify anti-Semitic incidents."