

# **Extract from**

# **Master's Thesis**

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Politics response to antisemitic incidents in Austria: An  
investigation on the adequacy of the "Nationale Strategie gegen  
Antisemitismus"

by Felix Meusburger

Examiner:

Univ. Prof. Michael Müller-Camen Ph.D

Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Yochanan Altman

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## **Defining antisemitism: A closer look at the IHRA antisemitism working definition**

Considering the aim of this thesis, it is vital to find a clear definition of antisemitism. The most common definition of antisemitism is the working definition of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). The committee of the IHRA published it in 2016. Since then, it has been adopted as a non-legally binding definition in many countries, including France, Germany, Israel and the United Kingdom (Global Jewish Advocacy). Also, Austria has adopted this definition in 2017 and used it as a basis for the "Nationale Strategie gegen Antisemitismus" (Bundeskanzleramt, 2021; Die Presse, 2017). The definition is as follows:

*"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."*

(International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2016)

The generic nature of this definition allows a wide margin for interpretation. Therefore, it can be pretty hard to evaluate whether a particular incident can be deemed antisemitic. When working on this thesis and talking to victims of antisemitic incidents, it becomes clear that, while some cases are clearly antisemitic, there are others where motives, that are not per se antisemitic, could have played a role. It is crucial to have the ability to differentiate here clearly. Therefore, the IHRA working definition for antisemitism provides twelve examples that should help with that (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2016). These guiding examples were used to further elaborate on defining if a specific incident should be considered antisemitic. This has been done by visualizing them in a decision tree as a first step. In a second step, the individual stages of the decision tree are elaborated on to define the questions further and help the user answer them. Moreover, for controversial and highly discussed topics, current opinions have been incorporated, and, therefore, the user will be guided in the process of answering these questions. Additionally, for some questions, clear examples will be provided.

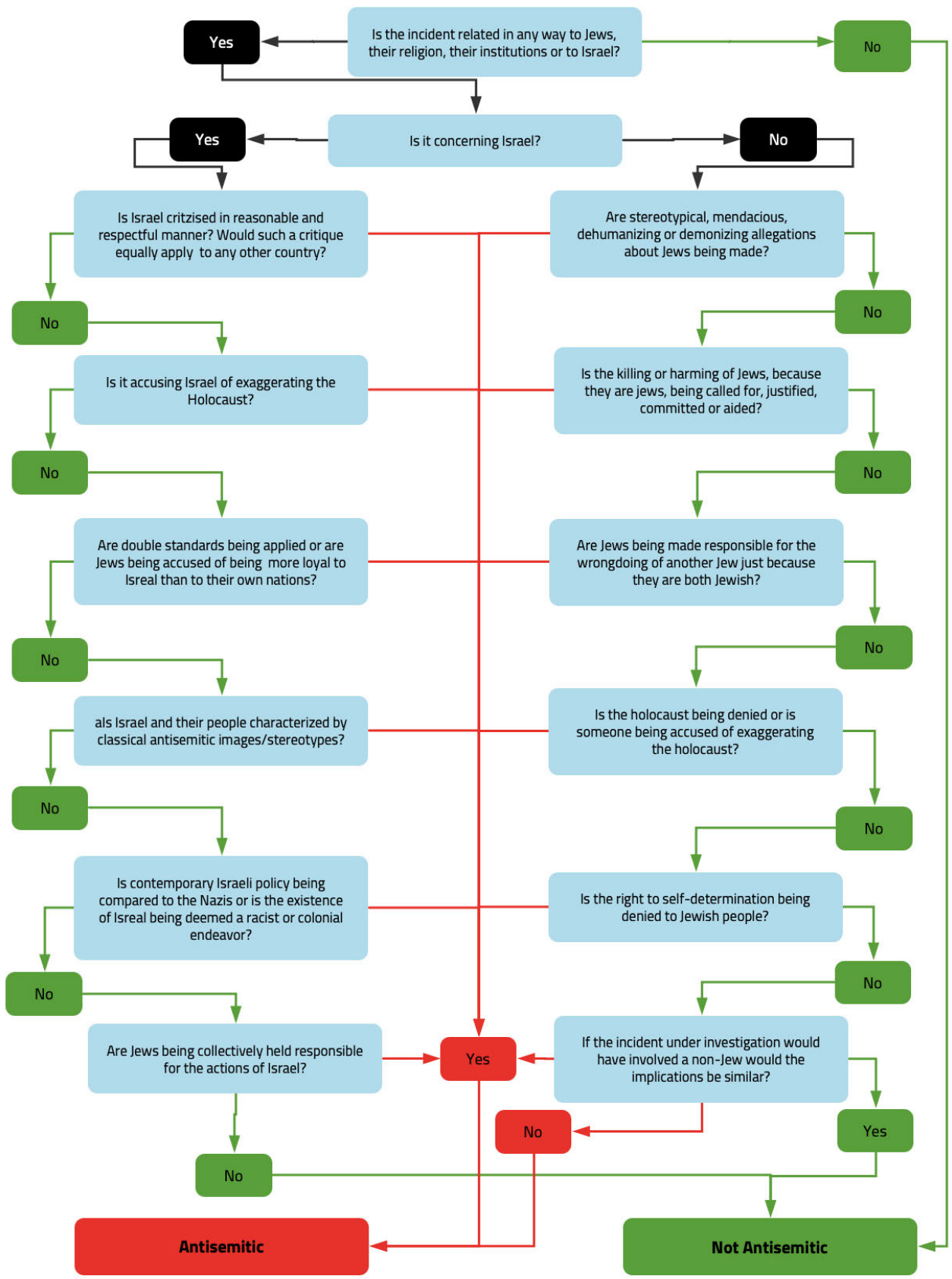


Figure 1: Decision Tree for the IHRA antisemitism working definition

For something to be antisemitic, it needs to be related to Judaism. Therefore, the decision tree's very first node concentrates on this question. This connection can happen in different ways. First, antisemitism can be directed towards a particular person, which can but does not have to be Jewish. This is because non-Jewish people can also become victims of antisemitic incidents. For example, in many cultures, the word "Jew" is still used as a swear word. As of recently, even in Germany the leading dictionary "Duden" referred to the German word for Jew - "Jude" - as a discriminatory word (Jerusalem Post, 2022). Hence, a non-Jewish person being called "Jude" in Germany still was officially deemed negative and therefore presumably antisemitic. Besides natural persons, institutions, communities, religious facilities and even countries can become victims of antisemitism. One of the prime examples of antisemitism towards non-natural persons would be attacks on synagogues, where countless examples can be found on the news.

When looking closely at the definition of the IHRA, and especially at the examples provided, two main directions can be observed. Of the twelve examples, eight are at least mentioning Israel. Therefore, to make the decision tree more effective, it is split into two main paths. The so-called "Israel-related antisemitism" path, which will be elaborated on in the following sub-chapter, and the "non-Israel-related antisemitism" path, which will be focused on afterwards.

### **Israel-related antisemitism**

When looking at possible cases of antisemitism, one must first distinguish between reasonable and respectful critics of Israel and radical antizionist behaviour. One could risk undermining the importance of fighting antisemitism when mixing up these two topics. With the IHRA definition of antisemitism, critics accuse the alliance of using antisemitism and its definition to avoid criticism towards Israel. Some voices say that the definition has become too political. Gould, for example, argues that "With its intensive focus on the critique of Israel as a marker of antisemitism, the IHRA definition has been heavily implicated in the suppression of Israel-critical speech in recent years." (Gould, 2020). Specifically, opinions like the one from Gould underline the importance of working on a clearer understanding of the IHRA definition. The IHRA clearly stated in their definition that "criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic" (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2016). Therefore, the first question of this path of the decision tree focuses precisely on this. When looking at a possible Israel-related case of antisemitism, one should first evaluate if what has been stated towards Israel can be considered reasonable and respectful. If this is the case, it is probably not antisemitic. If there is no clear answer to be found at first glance, it can be helpful to consider the same accusation being directed toward a different country. If it would be normal towards any other country, it is probably also fine to be directed towards Israel and therefore can be seen as not antisemitic.

However, if this question cannot clearly be answered with yes, specific examples provided by the IHRA can help to identify if an Israel-related incident is antisemitic. One clear example of antisemitism occurs when Israel gets accused of exaggerating the holocaust. Antisemites find many reasons why Israelis and Jews in general could be accused of this. For more details on this, please refer to the next sub-chapter, there a section is solely dedicated to what can be considered a denial or a distortion of the holocaust.

Israel-related antisemitism can also be expressed by applying double standards. This is accusing Israel of things other countries would not be accused of or demanding something from Israel that would not be requested from other countries. This is, for example, being expressed by criticising Israel for its behaviour in the conflict with Palestine in an unjustified way (World Jewish Congress, 2022).

If what has been discussed above does not apply, one should consider whether stereotypes and certain characteristics are being used. This goes way back in history. Despite knowing what impact these stereotypes had in the 1930s and 1940s, where the Nazis used them to justify their actions, they are still being applied today, both to Jews individually and to the people of Israel in general (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018). The cartoon shown in Figure 2 provides an example of this. It collectively accuses the people of Israel of "the Judaization of Jerusalem" and displays a man with characteristics often used to portray Jews.

The BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) movement is one of many examples of another Israel-related facet of antisemitism. Here, the very existence of Israel and the right to self-determination of the people of Israel is being denied (Anti-Defamation League). This is because followers of such movements are accusing the state of Israel of being a racist endeavour with no right to exist. Sometimes even comparisons to Nazi Regime are being made, an example of this is provided in Figure 3.

While it was already elaborated that respectful and reasonable criticism towards Israel and its politics is not considered antisemitic, it still has to be clearly stated that it is considered antisemitic if Jews are being collectively held responsible for the state's actions of Israel. This is independent of whether the criticism itself is being considered antisemitic or not.

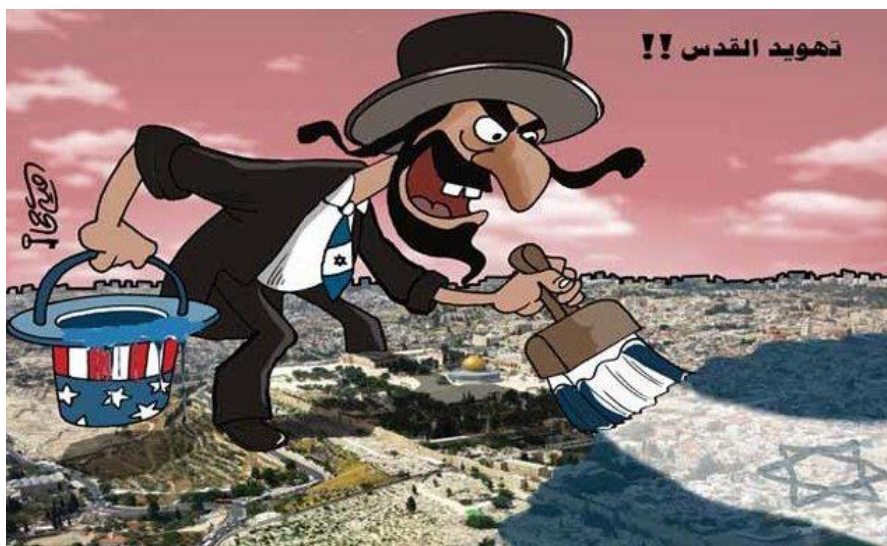


Figure 2: Antisemitic Cartoon accusing Israel of "the Judaization of Jerusalem" (al-Raya, 2017; Anti-Defamation League, 2018)

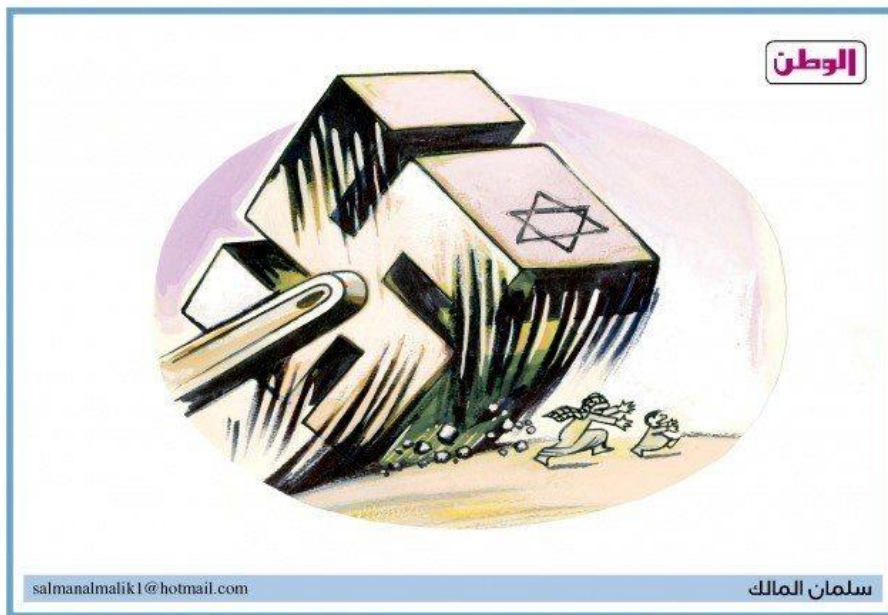


Figure 3: Antisemitic Cartoon comparing Israel with Nazi-Regime (al-Malik, 2018; Anti-Defamation League, 2018)

### Non-Israel related antisemitism

The right side of the decision tree is concerned with antisemitism that has no connection to Israel. As explained in the previous sub-chapter, Figure 2 provides an example of stereotypes and characteristics that the people of Israel are accused of. These stereotypes and characteristics are a result of what Jews in general have been accused of since the Middle Ages (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018). Throughout history, Jews have been accused of carnality, global conspiracy, ritual slaughter, greediness, criminality, and many other things (Marcus, 2016). Whenever someone accuses a Jewish person of these stereotypes and characteristics without any reason, it is very likely antisemitic.

Obviously, it is also considered antisemitic whenever a Jewish person is being attacked or killed for being Jewish. Even incentivising, helping, or justifying such a crime is clearly an antisemitic incident.

It is also antisemitic whenever a Jew is being punished or made accountable for the wrongdoing of another Jew. This can happen for multiple reasons. It, for example, can be interconnected to the stereotypes mentioned above. Even today, Jews are being accused of conspiring against the rest of the world and of only being loyal to other Jews (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018). Due to this, it can even happen subconsciously that Jews are being seen as one entity and not as individuals. Just recently there has been a case, where a whole group of Jews has been punished for the alleged wrongdoing of a part of their group. On a Lufthansa flight, a group of orthodox Jews was denied a flight because some members of their group allegedly refused to comply with the mask regulations. Even though only a few members did not fulfil the regulations, the Lufthansa staff blocked all visible Jewish passengers from the flight, even the ones that perfectly met the requirements and did not belong to the same group because the staff argued that

"everyone has to pay for the mistakes of a few". This clearly shows the generalization that has happened here. An entire group is made responsible for the actions of a few. (Lederman/Olympia, 2022).

Much of the expressed antisemitism is connected to the holocaust. In 2013 the IHRA released a definition that defines what is considered a denial or distortion of the Holocaust (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2013). Their definition goes as follows:

*"Holocaust denial is discourse and propaganda that deny the historical reality and the extent of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices during World War II, known as the Holocaust or the Shoah. Holocaust denial refers specifically to any attempt to claim that the Holocaust/Shoah did not take place. [..]*

*Distortion of the Holocaust refers, inter alia, to:*

- 1. Intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust or its principal elements, including collaborators and allies of Nazi Germany;*
- 2. Gross minimization of the number of the victims of the Holocaust in contradiction to reliable sources;*
- 3. Attempts to blame the Jews for causing their own genocide;*
- 4. Statements that cast the Holocaust as a positive historical event. Those statements are not Holocaust denial but are closely connected to it as a radical form of antisemitism. They may suggest that the Holocaust did not go far enough in accomplishing its goal of "the Final Solution of the Jewish Question";*
- 5. Attempts to blur the responsibility for the establishment of concentration and death camps devised and operated by Nazi Germany by putting blame on other nations or ethnic groups." (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2013)*

Hence, whenever someone expresses an opinion on the Holocaust that is in accordance with the definition above, it is considered a denial or distortion of the Holocaust, which subsequently is antisemitic.

It is also antisemitic to deny a Jewish person the right to self-determination because the person is Jewish. This is closely connected to the denial of self-determination of the state of Israel as many cases where Jews are denied the right of self-determination relate to Israel (United Nations, 2005). Additionally, whenever a Jewish person is denied this fundamental human right due to their religion, as has happened many times during the Nazi Regime, it is antisemitic (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018).

While the nodes of the decision tree described above will probably be able to cover most cases of antisemitism, it is impossible to catch all facets of a social phenomenon already lasting for many centuries. Therefore, the last node of the non-Israel-related branch is becoming more generic again. As the last step, when none of the nodes before could be answered with "Yes", but there is still a feeling that the incident is antisemitic, one can evaluate if the incident would have happened

similarly if there would have been no relation to Judaism. If the situation would have been similar and the outcome would have been equal, the incident probably was not related to antisemitism.

What has been elaborated throughout this chapter shows how many facets antisemitism can have and hence how difficult it sometimes can be to evaluate if something is antisemitic or not. One must be careful and wisely decide when blaming something to be antisemitic. If it is used without proper reasoning and therefore gets too generic, it could lose some relevance. Looking at the Holocaust and what antisemitism can lead to, it would be fatal to weaken its importance by using it unthinkingly. For that reason, this has hopefully contributed to the more straightforward applicability of the IHRA working definition and subsequently enables users of this decision tree to evaluate better the relevance of an incident with respect to antisemitism.



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