

When Criticism of Israel Becomes Antisemitic – Implications for Belgian Policy

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The
Israel Clarity
Initiative

Verifiable Facts for Policymakers

Claims that “all criticism of Israel is legitimate” and can never be antisemitic misrepresent both the facts and Belgian law. Certain statements invoke classic antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories. Belgium’s strong commitment to the rules-based order and its anti-racism legislation is an asset, but recent public statements risk misapplying core legal principles and weakening the fight against hatred.

Definitional and Legal Basis

1. IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism

- Belgium and the EU have adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition. It explicitly states that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.” Antisemitism begins when criticism uses **Jewish stereotypes**, applies double standards, or holds Jews collectively responsible for Israeli actions.

2. Belgian Anti-Racism Law (30 July 1981)

- The Law of 30 July 1981 on the punishment of certain acts inspired by racism or xenophobia criminalises incitement to discrimination, **hatred** or violence based on race, colour, origin or ethnic descent (including **Jewish descent**). A 1995 law further prohibits Holocaust denial, minimisation or justification.

3. Classic Antisemitic Tropes

- Statements that single out “Jewish money,” “Jewish power,” or “Jewish control” of finance, media or world events revive the oldest and most dangerous **antisemitic conspiracy**. These are not policy critiques; they are prohibited under Belgian law when they incite hatred.

4. Recent Case: Belgian MP Gwendolen Rutten

- On 23 April 2026, during a debate on Eurovision MP **Gwendolyn Rutten** stated that the main sponsor “*is a Jewish firm... with lots of money...as we all know money rules the world.*” This deliberately highlights Jewish identity and invokes the myth of Jewish global control – **textbook antisemitism** under the IHRA definition and the 1981 Anti-Racism Law.

Belgium’s Position and Risks

Belgium rightly refuses to tolerate racism and has an inter-federal coordination mechanism chaired by the FPS Justice. However, unlike 23 of the 27 EU member states, **Belgium still has no dedicated national Antisemitism Coordinator** and **no comprehensive national strategy to combat antisemitism** and foster Jewish life (as repeatedly urged by the CCOJB and other Jewish organisations). Recent statements that blur legitimate policy criticism with antisemitic conspiracy theories risk: undermining enforcement of the 1981 Anti-Racism Law; encouraging extremism and endangering Jewish communities.

Recommendations for Belgian Leaders

Belgian policymakers need to:

- Affirm** the IHRA definition and apply it consistently in public discourse;
- Enforce** the 1981 Anti-Racism Law without hesitation when antisemitic tropes are used;
- Distinguish sharply** between factual criticism of Israeli policy and antisemitic conspiracy theories that have no place in the Flemish or Belgian Parliament.