

Insights document

Zionist Enterprise Department European workshop.
October 19, 2025

Introduction

This document presents key insights from the Budapest strategic workshop held in October 2025, convened by the Zionist Enterprises Department (ZED) of the World Zionist Organization in partnership with Atchalta.

For the past year, the department has been utilizing a unique methodology developed by Atchalta to generate new practical and conceptual ideas to help Jewish and Israeli leaders in this dramatic era, and to shape a vital Jewish cultural and liberal Zionist identity with Israel at its heart.

The Budapest workshop took place one year after the first Jerusalem workshop (October 2024), seven months after the New York workshop (March 2025), and a few months after online sessions with representatives from South Africa, Belgium, Italy (July 2025) and Australia & New Zealand (August 2025).

Ideas and collaborative efforts that emerged in earlier sessions are already being integrated into ZED's work. Looking ahead, additional forums – including a dedicated working group – will focus on developing new language and frameworks to bridge the conceptual gaps identified across all sessions.

Core themes observed

The participants in the Budapest gathering represented a remarkably diverse group. Geographically, they came from **Western Europe** (Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands), **Northern Europe** (Denmark), the **Balkans** (Romania and Bulgaria), **Central Europe** (Hungary and Czechia), and even from **outside Europe** - Argentina, Israel, and Australia. They included both **senior and emerging leaders, professionals and lay activists**, voices from the **political right and left**, and **a wide range of fields**. Notably, some participants who divide their time between Israel and abroad contributed perspectives shaped by both environments. The following outlines the core themes we observed:

‘October 8’ Jewish awakening and erosion (‘Jewish Fatigue’)

In a similar, though less striking, pattern to other regions, participants in the Budapest gathering reflected on the profound shifts in Jewish identity experienced since October 7, 2023. In the immediate aftermath, they **reported increased communal and personal engagement in Jewish life, a renewed sense of the need to be surrounded by a Jewish environment and shared political mobilization, particularly around the cause of the hostages.**

However, as observed in other workshops, this initial awakening has gradually eroded amid the prolonged war and the external as well as internal tensions it has generated. The result is what we previously termed **‘Jewish fatigue’**: **a sense of emotional exhaustion, reluctance to engage publicly, and a shrinking space to express Jewish identity openly, particularly its Zionist dimension.**

The Effects of Antisemitism and the Delegitimization of Israel

As observed in every session held to date, the surge in antisemitism since October 7 has deeply affected Jewish communities across nearly every aspect of communal and individual life. In the European context, participants identified both shared global patterns and unique regional dynamics.

❖ Security Concerns Undermining participation in the Community

A sentiment voiced with some hesitation, was **whether Israel has become a burden on the safety and public image of Jews as a whole.** Notably, participants emphasized that this was not necessarily their own view, but rather a sentiment increasingly heard within their communities.

Participants described a growing sense of fear triggered by rising antisemitism, prompting some Jews to **withdraw from communal life as a means of self-protection**, as a participant from Romania noted: *“At first, some Jews came closer to the community to feel safer, but with the rise in antisemitism, some now seek to distance themselves from it, going as far as requesting to be removed from the community membership list—in order to feel more protected.”*

❖ *Implications of the Association Between Israel and Judaism*

The rise in antisemitism and the growing delegitimization of Israel have made Judaism and Israel almost synonymous, an association many find impossible to escape. As one participant from the Netherlands reflected: *"My name sounds Jewish, and in many situations, I use a different one just to avoid the endless stream of anti-Israel remarks and prejudice."*

This conflation has had profound social implications. Jews of all ages are increasingly excluded from non-Jewish social spaces. Participants shared that many are losing their usual circles of friends, colleagues, and professional networks. Jewish individuals who were once active in volunteering, civic organizations, and multicultural environments are now retreating from these spaces, often out of fear or exhaustion from the hostility they face.

A recurring theme in this and previous sessions was the need to **create Jewish spaces that respond to the growing exclusion of Jews from broader social circles**, particularly within leftist environments, and to offer new spaces for Jews seeking meaningful social connection and belonging.

❖ *Frustration over the Discourse about Israel*

Participants expressed deep frustration at the absence of rational discourse and the intensity of hatred toward Israel and Jews displayed within the "Free Palestine" movement. As one participant put it, *"There is no point in speaking positively about Israel, because there is no substantive conversation. Israel could contribute a trillion dollars to curing cancer, and there would still be protests."* These frustrations have become even more evident considering the ceasefire, as one participant noted sarcastically: *"There's already a ceasefire, so why do you keep protesting?"*

❖ *Differences Between Western and Central/Eastern Europe*

While antisemitism has surged across the continent, participants reported striking differences in its nature and public visibility between regions.

In Western Europe, open hostility toward Jews and Israel has intensified dramatically, with Jewish institutions facing regular threats and public demonstrations becoming overtly aggressive. As a participant from Belgium noted, *"We couldn't even hold this kind of event in Belgium without special security, or possibly not at all."*

In contrast, Hungary and parts of Central and Eastern Europe also witnessed a surge in antisemitism, but as a Hungarian participant witnessed it created a paradox: *"Before October 7, Hungary was a super antisemitic country, and suddenly we became the peace"*

center. It feels safe here, but not because Hungary has improved. It's because the rest of the world has gotten so much worse."

The juxtaposition underscored the complexity of the European landscape, at least as reflected in the experiences of the countries represented in the workshop. In Western Europe, since October 7, the alliance of the political left and radical Islamic movements, the so-called "red-green alliance" has emerged as the primary source of threat to Jewish communities. In contrast, in Southern and Central Europe, where governments tend to be more pro-Israel and Muslim populations are smaller, the predominant danger remains the traditional right-wing antisemitism that has long existed in the region.

❖ *Situational surprise, not a Fundamental Surprise*

In contrast to participants from other regions in previous sessions, the European participants expressed a lower sense of "surprise" at the surge of antisemitism following October 7. For many, antisemitism had long been a visible and persistent reality, and the recent escalation was not unexpected, merely the intensification of an ongoing undercurrent. As one Hungarian participant noted, *"We are not like the American Jews who are only now realizing that antisemitism still exists."*

Jewish - European context

When preparing for the workshop, we were uncertain whether the notion of a shared European *identity* would manifest. While all European participants came from EU member states, we should acknowledge that the group did not include representatives from some of Europe's larger and more established Jewish communities, such as those in France, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

The participants represented smaller and mid-sized communities, each shaped by distinct surrounding cultures and historical experiences. **Nonetheless, several European features emerged, rooted in shared contexts and common challenges.**

❖ *Is There a Future for Jews in Europe?*

More than in previous sessions, the European context brought forth an acute question: **is there a viable future for Jewish life in Europe?** In addition to the "regular" concerns voiced in Jewish communities world wide, including antisemitism, polarization, and what we've termed "Jewish fatigue", European communities face several accumulating challenges: hostile or indifferent governments (for some, as in Spain), chronic lack of resources, small and aging populations, a stronger 'living' memory of the Holocaust and external geopolitical threat from Russia.

Some participants spoke openly about ***“living in constant readiness to leave”***, expressing a constant sense of uncertainty and fear of an imminent crisis. Others described a growing emotional and psychological detachment, questioning whether long-term continuity is realistic under such conditions. As one participant put it: *“After October 7, we also began asking more basic questions about the continuity of Jewish life in Europe. It’s as if Europe has shown us, in a different way, that it’s not always a safe place for Jews.”*

❖ ***Underrecognized and Overlooked***

The sentiment among many participants was that European Jewish communities remain underrecognized and often overlooked within the broader Jewish world, especially in comparison to Israel, North America, and even Latin America and the Anglo-Saxon countries. In that sense, the very convening of this workshop was, for many participants, itself a form of acknowledgment and validation.

❖ ***The Experience of Small, Resource-Limited Communities***

Across much of Europe, Jewish communities’ ability to advance communal or public causes is inherently constrained, both due to limited financial and organizational capacity, and because they have little foothold in the economic, political, or media spheres of their respective countries. As a result, their voices are often absent from national conversations, even on issues that directly affect Jewish life. Notably, reactions and comments from participants representing more established communities in Argentina and Australia highlighted the significant gap in organizational capacity and political strength between their communities and the smaller European ones.

❖ ***Fragmentation and the Quest for Unity***

Many of those present were from small Jewish communities, some in countries with only a few thousand Jews. Interestingly, the theme of unity and collaboration among Jewish communities arose more strongly in this workshop than in previous ones, reflecting the shared reality of limited resources and small community size that characterizes much of European Jewry. Participants emphasized the need to build stronger connections between communities, transcending religious and political differences and cultivating a sense of belonging rooted in shared culture and identity.

A striking observation was the **lack of familiarity** between communities, both on personal and organizational level. Participants noted that leaders from neighbouring countries, even those serving in similar roles within the same international organizations, had never met or worked together before. This lack of connection underscored the fragmentation that small European communities often experience, even when they share similar challenges and goals.

Many recalled how this spirit of unity was more present in the early days of the war, when communities, both within the same countries and across borders, rallied together around the cause of the hostages. Yet as time passed, that initial solidarity began to fade, raising the question of how to sustain meaningful cooperation and a shared sense of purpose beyond moments of crisis.

Relations with Israel: Israel's Blind Spots

Participants in the European workshop expressed a clear desire for more robust and consistent engagement from official Israeli actors within their communities. Interestingly, this sentiment was largely absent from previous sessions, where participants represented more established and resourceful communities. In those settings, communities often possess deeper institutional legacies in public relations, stronger financial and professional capacity, and greater administrative influence. Broadly speaking, such communities tend to engage more comfortably with Israeli civil society organizations rather than with state institutions.

By contrast, the European call, emerging primarily from smaller and less resourced communities, reflects a genuine desire for stronger involvement and partnership with official Israel. This presents an opportunity for both the Israeli government and legacy Jewish and Israeli institutions to rethink and deepen their engagement.

❖ *Strategic Co-Ownership*

Many participants expressed a shared appeal for the Israeli government to take into consideration the voices of diaspora Jews and construct a shared strategy for mutual challenges. As one participant summarized: *“In the past, Israel and the Diaspora were not interlinked or interdependent in a vital way; now we are. We need a clear mutual strategy.”*

❖ *Diaspora Jews and Antisemitism are NOT a Strategic Priority for the Israeli government*

Participants expressed prevailing sentiment that Israel does not always recognize how its decisions reverberate in the daily lives of Jews abroad. This concern was illustrated by a Hungarian participant who recounted a visit from an Israeli official who made a public statement urging local Jews to invest their money in purchasing property in Israel rather than in Hungary, apparently unaware of how such remarks could echo classic antisemitic tropes.

This sentiment echoes a broader call articulated in **Atchalta’s recent policy paper, [“The Playbook to fighting Antisemitism,”](#)** which urges the State of Israel to **recognize antisemitism and the delegitimization of Israel as national security concerns** that must be integrated into policymaking. The paper further advocates for **closer collaboration**

between Israel, Jewish communities, and pro-Israel allies worldwide in confronting these challenges.

❖ *NOT enough support from official Israel in the PR War*

In the immediate aftermath of October 7, one participant recalled reaching out to the Israeli embassy expecting guidance: *"In my innocence, I thought I would get some guiding lines. Then, over the next month, I realized nothing was going to come from there."* He later clarified that while he no longer expects Israel to provide top-down directives, he does hope for a more **collaborative and coordinated approach**: *"I don't expect the State of Israel to give us guidance anymore, but I do expect it to foster cooperation, exchange ideas, and help communities build common positions together."*

This perspective extended to the global fight against antisemitism. Participants acknowledged that Israel cannot directly address local manifestations of antisemitism or intervene in every issue affecting Jewish communities abroad. Nevertheless, they emphasized that Israel **should provide far greater support to local organizations** already engaged in this struggle.

In this context, it is worth highlighting the emerging [MaccabiCast](#) initiative, a joint venture of the **Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and the Fight Against Antisemitism**, together with the **Maccabi World Union**, as a promising example of a new, collaborative model. MaccabiCast aims to empower local actors and strengthen global cooperation in combating antisemitism and the delegitimization of Israel.

❖ *Need to develop a more affordable Shalichim model*

Many communities emphasized their ongoing need for a meaningful connection with Israel particularly through the presence of Israeli *shlichim*. However, they also described the challenges of both funding and finding suitable professionals for these roles. This reality highlights the importance of developing **more flexible and hybrid shlichim models**, enabling smaller communities to maintain an Israeli presence within their teams.

In this context, it is worth noting the [Madrichim LaChagim](#) ("Holiday Instructors") program of the ZED, which sends trained young Israelis to Jewish communities around the world to lead cultural and educational programming during the Jewish holidays.

Insights to move forward

As part of the workshop, participants were invited to develop new conceptual and practical ideas inspired by the discussions. The following insights draw on participants' observations

from this and previous gatherings, combined with Atchalta's unique AI tool, *The Calibrator*, and the organizers' professional experience and expertise.

1. A More Robust Model for Israel–Diaspora Relations for European (and Small?) Communities

As noted by participants, there is a clear need for more robust and meaningful Israeli engagement within their communities. First, this calls for **official Israeli bodies** to strengthen outreach and re-establish trust, particularly in light of the confusion and lack of coordination that many experienced during the early days of the war. Second, it represents an opportunity for **Israeli and Jewish civil society organizations** to step in and help fill existing gaps by providing **resources, expertise, and organizational capacity**.

While larger and more established communities may have the networks and infrastructure to navigate these challenges independently, for smaller European communities, even modest assistance from Israel or global partners can serve as a **significant force multiplier**, amplifying their ability to act, respond, and endure.

2. Creating a Richer Jewish Cultural Identity - European Context

Across all gatherings, a central idea emerged: the need to develop richer cultural frameworks for Jewish identity, anchored in Jewish values and a proud, liberal, and democratic Zionism. A growing recognition also emerged of the importance of advancing an international effort to create meaningful cultural experiences that engage younger and less affiliated Jews.

The European gathering reaffirmed the importance of these ideas. In the European context, the theme carried particular significance: without any prior prompting or framing by the organizers, the term “*cultural Judaism*” surfaced repeatedly during the discussions, with many participants describing their connection to Judaism in those terms. This observation aligns with findings from a 2021 JPR study, based on 2018 polling data, which indicated high levels of identification with Judaism as a culture among European Jews, an identification even stronger among younger generations. ^[1]

This suggests that efforts to establish a meaningful Jewish cultural identity could be especially fruitful within the European Jewish community, which is often overlooked in broader global Jewish strategies.

3. Building a stronger European Jewish collaboration

As mentioned, many participants appreciated the opportunity to be among other European Jewish leaders and to discover shared challenges, suggesting that there are few existing spaces for such encounters. **The gatherings highlighted the need to establish more**

cross-country leadership forums to discuss current issues, exchange ideas, and pool resources.

4. New Insights in the Fight Against Antisemitism

Participants identified several new perspectives and approaches for addressing the growing challenge of antisemitism:

1. **Reframing the narrative:** To present the “Free Palestine” protests not merely as demonstrations against Israel or the Jews, but as a broader threat to the core values of Western societies. This perspective also appeared in Atchalta’s abovementioned paper.
2. **Increased public attention toward Jews:** While in the post WW2 era in Europe Jews have been viewed as a marginal minority, they have now moved to the forefront of public discourse. Although this visibility currently provokes negative sentiment, it also creates an opportunity to improve public understanding and awareness of Jewish life and culture.
3. **Developing tools to support non-Jews:** Participants described a troubling inadequacy among key institutions, including schools, universities, and governments, in effectively addressing antisemitism. They noted that much of this failure stems less from malice and more from incompetence or a tendency to “sweep it under the rug.” This highlights a critical need for proactive strategies to confront the rising tide of antisemitism: first, by holding institutions more accountable for their actions, and second, by developing educational and legal tools to help non-Jews recognize and combat antisemitism.

Closing Reflection

The Budapest workshop reaffirmed the value of creating spaces for strategic reflection and cross-community dialogue at a time of unprecedented strain on Jewish life globally. The discussions revealed both the depth of shared challenges and the remarkable resilience that continues to define Jewish communities across Europe. Despite fatigue, fear, and fragmentation, participants demonstrated a strong desire to rethink models of engagement — between Jews and their communities, between Europe and Israel, and between cultural and political expressions of Jewish life.

[1] JPR (2021). The Jewish Identities of European Jews: What, Why and How. Based on FRA 2018 Jewish survey data.