

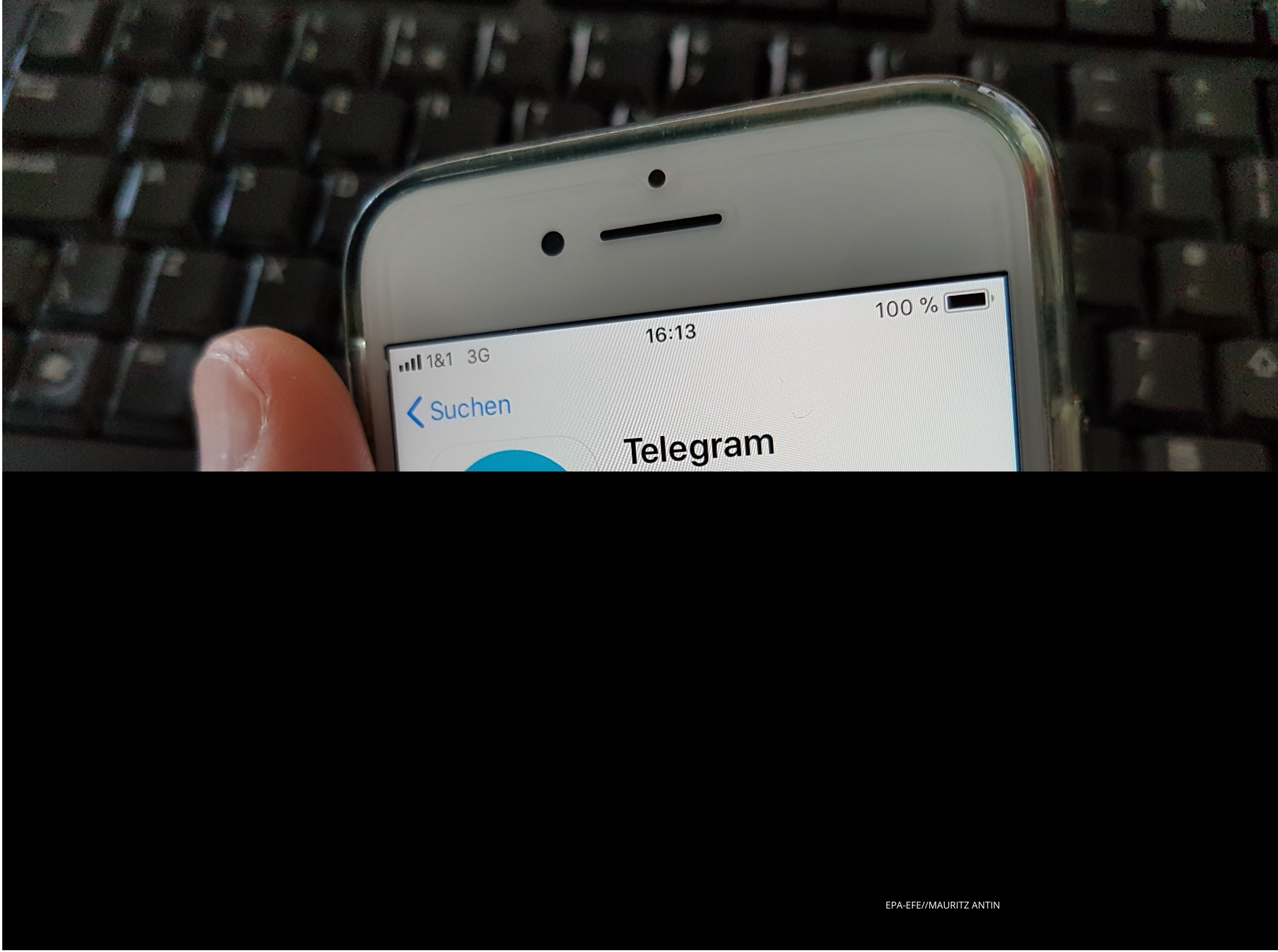
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Legalizing Holocaust denial 2.0

 By Maram Stern

Born in Berlin, Stern has served as the Vice President of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) since 2019. He is responsible for dialogue with Christian churches and other religions.



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More and more right-wing extremist agitators are cavorting on Telegram. They do not even shy away from calls to murder Jews, but there must no longer be a lawless space on the internet for spreading hatred and agitation and for calls for acts of violence.

"The Jews are not human beings, they are rats."

"The Holocaust is a gigantic lie of the Jews, who won both wars!"

"As long as there are Jews, there will be wars between the peoples!"

Whoever spreads such hate slogans must expect criminal prosecution in all EU countries. This must also apply to media and platforms that disseminate such content.

But the platform Telegram, which claims to be a mere messenger service and claims to publish content only in the spirit of free expression, offers round-the-clock digital space for the dissemination of such hate slogans and for calls for acts of violence.

It also allows the German-born Holocaust denier Attila Hildmann, who fled to Turkey, to spread anti-Semitic hate messages quoted above to his followers, who now number over 110,000. I find it intolerable and scandalous that such and similar right-wing extremist content is apparently allowed to be disseminated in Europe without judicial consequences.

Yet, both the individual European countries and the EU have committed themselves to fighting against calls for violence and the spreading of hate on the internet. Germany even led the way by tightening the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG). But platforms intended for "individual communication or the dissemination of specific content" are excluded from its scope.

Telegram continues to pretend that it does not fall under the provisions of such legal requirements. Admittedly, this legalizes a mockery of the victims of the Holocaust in 2021 – often supplemented by open calls for violence against Jews.

In a letter to the German Minister of the Interior, Horst Seehofer, I asked him to demand that those responsible for Telegram immediately delete such content and remove persons and organizations that promote violence and support hate speech.

In fact, Europol very recently cooperated with Telegram officials to block or remove accounts and channels linked to the so-called "Islamic State" (ISIS) and Islamist terror propaganda. This has subsequently also made the recruitment of IS supporters more difficult in the long term.

It is high time that similar measures are implemented in the far-right sector to remove individuals or organisations that promote and support far-right violence from Telegram.

At the end of 2020, the American-British Institute for Strategic Dialogue reported that in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, extremists from Germany, Austria and Switzerland were able to recruit more followers on the internet. "Especially on alternative platforms like Telegram, the channels of right-wing extremism grew," the report says.

The 2019 Global Terrorism Index also found that in the past five years, cases of far-right attacks have more than tripled worldwide. In addition, serious terrorist attacks have been perpetrated by individuals who had only a loose connection to terror groups but were incited to commit such acts by propaganda networks on social media. One example is the young Muslim Kujtim F., who killed four people and injured 23 others, some seriously, in a rampage in Vienna's city center on November 2, 2020.

Although the terms of use of Telegram prohibit calls for violence, enforcement by administrators seems to be extremely poor. Unlike other platforms, Telegram invokes freedom of expression and emphasises that it does not have to abide by "local restrictions on freedom of expression". As a result, Telegram has become a safe space for right-wing extremists.

Founded in 2013 by the Russian brothers Nikolai and Pavel Durov, 500 million people worldwide now use Telegram's services. According to the homepage, the development team is located in Dubai, and previously also in locations such as London, Berlin, Singapore and St. Petersburg. Since secret chats between terminals are also possible, this service is also popular among criminals and supporters of conspiracy theories of all kinds.

After the storming of the US Capitol in January this year, millions of Trump supporters switched from the blocked platforms such as Parler to Telegram.

The World Jewish Congress, which has also taken action against the accumulation of anti-Semitic short videos on the Chinese platform TikTok, calls on all governments to oblige those responsible for Telegram to take action against inflammatory campaigns, to immediately delete calls for violence and to remove accounts of individuals and organisations that promote and support violence.

For Holocaust deniers and supporters of violence and terror, there must be no more lawless space on the internet.

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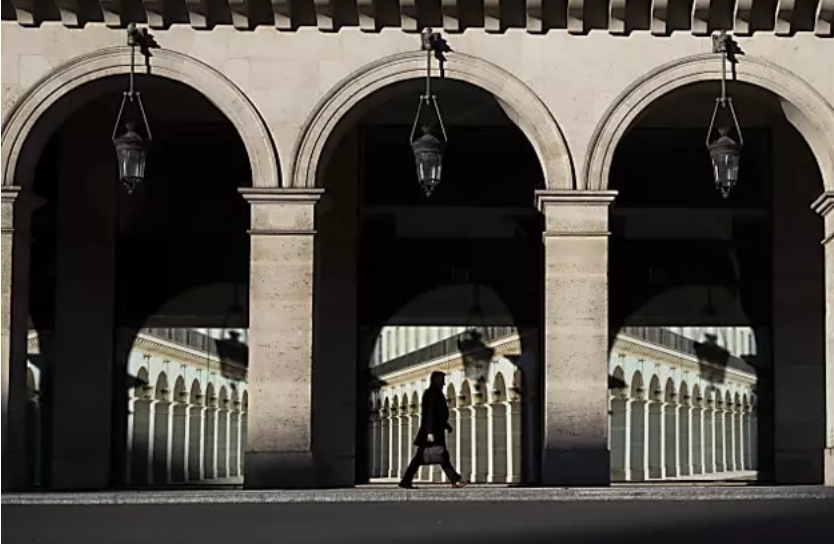
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