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Opinion

The Auschwitz violinist who never existed: Europe's new wave of Holocaust-distorting fakes

By [Michaela Kuechler](#), Berlin, 25 May 2026 10:00

A story about a young violinist in Auschwitz recently spread widely on Facebook. Hana Kovác, users were told, had played in the camp orchestra before being murdered after refusing to perform during a Nazi selection.

But Hana never existed. The [photographs were fake](#). The story was AI-generated fiction.

Over the past years, most of Europe has seen antisemitism re-emerge dramatically and in its most explicit and violent forms.

Yet alongside it, a more insidious trend is also taking hold: the growing normalisation of Holocaust distortion through fabricated imagery, misleading historical narratives and manipulated content.

The erosion of a shared understanding of historical facts does not only insult the memory of the victims and survivors, but also undermines democratic resilience and creates space for extremism to gain traction.

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In my first year as [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](#) (IHRA) secretary general, Europe has seen a stabbing near Berlin's Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe, assaults on rabbis and vandalism targeting Jewish sites in France, the prosecution of Holocaust-denier Vincent Reynouard, controversy surrounding antisemitic rhetoric in Romanian politics, and the deadly attack outside a synagogue in the United Kingdom – all of which point to a wider global rise in antisemitic incidents that has been felt beyond Europe as well.

These incidents are not isolated. They form part of a broader pattern in which antisemitism continues to manifest across European societies and in which the distortion of Holocaust history increasingly accompanies and amplifies that hostility.

From Holocaust-denial to Holocaust distortion

Explicit Holocaust denial still exists, but it largely remains on the fringes.

What is more concerning today is the rise of distortion – the trivialisation, misrepresentation or instrumentalisation of Holocaust history. This can take many forms: false equivalences that diminish the scale and intent of Nazi crimes, the misuse of Holocaust imagery or language for unrelated political purposes, or the subtle reframing of historical facts to serve contemporary agendas.

Such distortions may appear less overt than denial, but they are no less dangerous. They erode understanding and create fertile ground in which antisemitism can more easily grow.

In the aftermath of antisemitic incidents, we increasingly see these distortions proliferate online.

Social media platforms, while offering opportunities for education and remembrance, also host spaces where misleading narratives spread rapidly and with

little accountability.



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In these digital environments, historical facts are often stripped of context or manipulated before reaching audiences who may lack the tools to critically assess what they encounter.

The result is a feedback loop in which antisemitism and distortion reinforce one another, further undermining public understanding of the Holocaust.

This presents a profound challenge for policymakers, educators, and democratic societies more broadly. Holocaust education has long been recognised as an important contribution to efforts to combat antisemitism and promote human rights.

Last witnesses and survivors gone

The urgency of this task is heightened by another reality: we are entering what is often described as the “post-witness era”.

The passing of Holocaust survivors marks a profound transition in how this history is remembered and conveyed. As the generation of those who experienced the Holocaust first-hand diminishes, responsibility for preserving and communicating its history increasingly falls to memorial sites, institutions, archives and education systems.

Digital platforms and emerging technologies can expand access to historical material and reach new audiences - but they also carry significant risks.

Recent examples of AI systems generating Holocaust denial claims or reproducing

extremist rhetoric illustrate how easily falsehoods can be created and amplified. This makes it essential that historical accuracy and ethical responsibility are built into the design and governance of these technologies from the outset.

Teaching the facts of the Holocaust is no longer enough.

Education systems must actively equip students to recognise distortion and challenge misinformation online. The IHRA has sought to address these challenges through the publication of our [updated recommendations for teaching and learning about the Holocaust](#), which place a strong emphasis on digital literacy.

Yet no single country or institution can meet this challenge alone. Holocaust distortion is a transnational phenomenon, amplified by global digital networks. It therefore requires a coordinated, international response, particularly from within Europe.

There are positive examples to build upon.

The European Commission's [EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism](#) has set out a coordinated framework for action, while the [Digital Services Act](#) provides new tools to address the spread of illegal hate speech and disinformation online.

While these initiatives lay important groundwork, they must be matched by sustained political will and practical implementation if they are to meaningfully safeguard historical facts across Europe.

Europe must now reaffirm and deepen its commitment to this work.

This means investing in memorial sites, Holocaust museums, and education, supporting research and archives, strengthening legal frameworks where necessary, and working with technology companies to curb the spread of harmful content online, while taking decisive action where required.

Holocaust distortion may not always announce itself as loudly as denial, but its impact can be just as corrosive. If left unchallenged, it risks reshaping public understanding in ways that weaken our collective memory and our capacity to confront antisemitism.

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