

European Judaism

united in praising Europe

By Alexander Zanner

It is seldom, if not unseen, that the Jewish world can unite behind a particular project and even get well-deserved media attention for it. Europe is such a project, although I have to admit that some British Jewish representatives might disagree, at least openly. Antisemitic stereotyping includes always the image of a Jewish lobby; impressive in its means and influence. The reality is - unfortunately- much less glamorous, certainly if you look at Europe. A politically united Europe is still a dream in the pipeline of future accomplishments, but a dream worth to be pursued.



In the United States, where we can speak of one country from ocean to ocean and one political system along route 66, the Jewish Community is active in all domains, including politics. On the “old” continent, Jewish life is mostly social and therefore its representation is mainly felt in civil society. Focused political representation has no need and no purpose because ineffective in a shattered environment; but especially this makes issues of importance to a full Jewish lifestyle even more requisite.

Kashrut, Shechita, wearing of Jewish religious signs without being harassed and yes, even the way some want to dress and attend their synagogues while respected by the general society are all elements which can make or break the millennia of Jewish European Life and the proudness of being part not only of the past, but also of the future of what Europe aspires to become: an united continent, free of war and terrorism where human rights are respected as well as the freedom of exercise of all religions as long as they do not compel others to do the same.

Under the guidance of Chief Rabbi of Moscow Pin'has Goldschmidt, the European conference of Rabbis (CER) has succeeded where others failed. The organisation is Jewish in the full sense of the word: focused on all Jewish matters and politically active only when it serves Jewish causes. This -in essence- apolitical approach attracts far more political cloud and respect. On 23 of May, CER ceremoniously awarded the European Price for Judaism to two exceptional personalities for their dedication to Europe and to the defence of Judaism as integral part of European identity.

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M. Antonio Tajani, Chairman of the European Parliament always insisted that Europe is also build on Jewish heritage. Even in discussion with Mark Zuckerberg, he insisted on fighting antisemitism on social media.

M. Frans Timmermans, the first vice-president of the European Commission is the European personality most known by the Jewish population of Europe. He took on him the fight against antisemitism on European level and does this with dedication, conviction and sincerity so uncommon for a world-class politician.

The third price awarded that evening was for courage which should not even exist in contemporary Europe. It was the courage to disclose the dark past of an European country: Lithuania. Mrs. Ruta Vanagaite wrote a book on the persecution and murder of more than 200.000 Jews. But some

European countries with a past of active collaboration with the Nazis try to rewrite history by presenting themselves as victims of communism and not as persecutors of their own Jewish population. This denialism, slightly less evil than outright negationism, disguised as patriotism has no place in a free and democratic Europe; and yet it is tolerated even if it undermines all what Europe stands for.

Receiving the price in the presence of European dignitaries after being persecuted in her own country for telling the truth is more than symbolic. It provides hope that one day Europe will be more than just a project in continual search for accomplishment, but a reality which cannot be overturned or hijacked by nationalists who longer for a past build on hate and desolation.

