



COMBATING ANTISEMITISM FOSTERING JEWISH life



Speech by Katharina von Schnurbein, Coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life

European days of Jewish Culture
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Jews' contribution to Europe

Europe would not be Europe without its Jewish heritage. For over 2000 years, Jews have contributed culturally, intellectually, economically to European society.

We are touched and enriched when reading the works of Moses Maïmonides and Franz Kafka, when contemplating the artworks of Felix Nussbaum and Charlotte Salomon, we are moved by the photographs of Robert Capa, and vibrating when listening to the soulful voice of Amy Winehouse. These artists and so many others have left and continue to leave an indelible trace in our European society.

I am touch by standing in this beautiful Synagogue whose fin de siècle architecture and location testifies of just how much Jewish and European culture was entangled here in Brussels in the heart of Europe.

Jews have been involved in the arts from Biblical times on, whether as commissioners or creators – always in dialogue with the world around them. Jewish art is as multifaceted and diverse as Jewish life.

After Auschwitz, Theodor Adorno thought it would be forever impossible to create poetry and art. Yet, post-war generations of Jewish artists shaped by the memories of the survivors, attempted to come to grips with the greatest trauma in Jewish history and the greatest abyss of mankind.

Jewish heritage and EDJC

Jewish heritage is part of Europe's DNA. And as European institutions, we want to protect Jewish heritage, to safeguard and cherish it. This is a key aspect of fostering Jewish life, which is the ultimate goal of the EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, which I had the tremendous honour to draft some two years ago.

So, supporting this 24th edition of the European Days of Jewish Culture through our Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) is not only logical, but natural.



It is timely that this year your programme focuses on Memory; on pivotal moments in Jewish history. I am delighted that Jewish culture is celebrated through more than 300 events across Europe and beyond during these days and I commend the outstanding work done by the AEPJ “European Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Jewish culture and Heritage”, for coordinating this project in cooperation with a broad network of institutions dedicated to Jewish heritage and culture.

Thank you for pursuing this work and for coming, every year, with a fresh view on how to reflect Jewish culture and heritage and its role and meaning for European societies.

I commend UNESCO for providing for the first time this year its patronage to your festival, underlining the importance of this event also for the European Routes of Jewish Heritage.

European Capitals of Culture

As stated in the EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, the Commission invites cities to address the history of their minorities, including of the Jewish community, when applying for the title of European Capital of Culture. And let’s be clear, there will not be many Capitals of culture that do not have traces of Jewish heritage.

As Brussels is applying to become Capital of Culture in 2030, we look forward to hearing on how they will valorise the Jewish culture and heritage in the capital of Europe.

Exactly a year ago, I visited Kaunas for the Litvak Culture Forum organised as part of the Kaunas Capital of Culture 2022. The Forum highlighted the forgotten Jewish pages of city’s history, and what it means to be a Litvak today.

This type of initiative brings visibility to Jewish culture and its presence in European cities. I look forward to seeing Jewish culture and heritage valued in all European cities as it is the case already in places like Prague, Budapest and Amsterdam, where synagogues and places of Jewish life a “must see” for any tourist visiting the city.

When it comes to fostering Jewish life, we look to the past and the present. I am delighted to address you in this magnificent synagogue, in which hundreds of believers will gather in about ten days for the celebrations of Tishre. In these walls will resonate in a few days the sound of the shofar, prayers, wishes and children’s laughter.

At the European Commission we are proud and will continue to do all what is in our remit to ensure that Jewish life will continue to flourish in the heart of the European capital and across the entire continent.

I wish you enjoyable and insightful European Days of Jewish Culture.

And ahead of the Jewish New Year, allow me to wish you already Shana Tova uMetuka! May the year 5784 be full of health, happiness and peace, with inspiring Jewish cultural projects!