

European Parliament President Shows Steadfast Support for the Jewish Community

European Parliament President Martin Schulz once more expressed his steadfast support for the Jewish communities in Europe by hosting the International Holocaust Remembrance Day Ceremony in the European Parliament last week and by speaking out publicly against the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe today.

After the official event he gladly accepted the European Coalition for Israel (ECI) challenge to have his picture taken, wearing a kippah to show his solidarity with the Jewish communities in Europe.

“There is a specific responsibility... to fight for NEVER AGAIN,” President Schulz said in his speech. “It saddens me deeply when young Jewish people doubt whether they can raise their children in Europe, whether it is right to stay. Some consider leaving Europe for good, because they no longer feel safe. Jewish life is a part of our culture and our identity, without the Jewish people Europe would not be Europe, but to our shame some have not learned the lessons of the past.

Many other EU leaders, among them Vice-President Antonio Tajani from Italy and Vice-President Ryszard Czarnecki from Poland, also put on a kippah in honor of the victims of the Holocaust and to raise awareness about the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe.

The EU leaders were joined by members of national parliaments across Europe who enthusiastically accepted the challenge. In Sweden, which is currently under a diplomatic blockade by Israel, all the men in the Christian Democratic Party group put on a kippah on Wednesday to show solidarity with the

Jewish communities in Sweden and across Europe. In an opinion editorial in the Swedish newspaper *Dagen*, Swedish MP Mikael Oscarsson and Party Chairman MP Ebba Busch-Thor challenged the other political parties in the parliament to do the same.

Meanwhile some ECI grassroots activists reported incidents where they had been verbally abused for simply wearing the Jewish kippah.

“This is an important experience for those of us who are not Jewish. It helps us to identify with our Jewish friends”, ECI Chairman Rudolf Geigy said after the Holocaust Remembrance Day Ceremony in the European Parliament, which he was attending as an official guest of Schulz. “It is shocking that after more than a thousand years of a Jewish presence in Europe some people still cannot seem to accept these communities,” he said.

For the last ten years ECI has provided educational resources for faith communities in Europe in order for them to commemorate the Holocaust Remembrance Day and raise awareness of the concrete challenges that many Jews are facing in Europe still today. In Brussels, the capital of the EU institutions, many Jews avoid wearing their kippahs in public today in fear of being physically assaulted. Four Jews were gunned down at the Jewish Museum in Brussels on the eve of the European elections in May 2014, sending shockwaves throughout Europe. Jews were also singled out and killed at the terrorist attacks in Paris in January and November.

“Holocaust Remembrance Day loses its meaning if we fail to identify and address the problems that the surviving Jewish communities are facing in Europe today,” ECI Founding Director Tomas Sandell said. He praised the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls for standing up for the Jewish communities in France and the French government for taking firm action to protect their Jewish citizens. He pointed out, however, that police protection alone will not solve the

problem. Europe urgently needs to learn once again the lessons from the Holocaust.

“We have to invest more resources in preventive measures and education in order to teach a new generation of Europeans about the Holocaust. Many young people today belong to families which have migrated to Europe and do not share the same sense of historical responsibility as older generations,” Tomas Sandell said.

He welcomed the decision of the EU Commission in December of last year to appoint a coordinator to combat anti-Semitism, but called for sufficient resources to be allocated to this important post in order to take on the massive challenge that Europe is facing. “One coordinator alone will not be sufficient to stand up against these dark forces of the past. The EU needs a whole task force to engage in this battle for the soul of Europe. If the Jewish communities no longer feel safe in Europe, the European project has failed,” Sandell said.

Dr. Moshe Kantor, President of the European Jewish Congress, echoed these thoughts at the official ceremony in the European Parliament when he spoke about the tensions, which the EU labelling of Israeli products has caused among European Jewry.

“We identify this as a new type of anti-Semitism,” he said. “It is dangerous for all, for Jews, for the State of Israel and for Europe itself. ... This is very similar to using yellow stars again. Never again should mean never again.”