

President's acceptance of the King David Award
Speech by President Metsola
7th November 2022

Rabbi Menachem Margolin,
Members of the European Jewish Association,
Ambassadors,
Distinguished guests,
Prime Minister,

It was my first time at Auschwitz-Birkenau. I struggled to comprehend how a quiet part of the world, surrounded by beautiful Birch trees, provided the setting for the worst crimes man has ever seen.

And Rabbi, you were right today, everyone in the world should come here. Everyone in the world must know the depths to which man has sunk to and the horror that stems from indifference.

It was hard not to imagine the shadows of the lives we walked in today. The mothers separated from their babies, the parents powerless to protect their children, the screams, the tears, the fear, reverberated in the silence of the leaves falling to ground.

But even among the horror, I found hope. I saw resilience. I recognised fortitude. People who despite the humiliation, the torture, the hate, stood up to warn the world. A warning that we must repeat again and again, especially when the voices of the last survivors fall silent.

I think it was Roman Kent who said Auschwitz did not fall from the sky. It was the result of years, generations of propaganda, dehumanisation, the need to blame “the other”.

Every time I visit a synagogue in Brussels, Vienna or anywhere around Europe, I remain struck by the fact that the entrances are always barricaded with security apparatus.

It drives home the message that anti-Semitism is still rife in our societies. That 84 years since Kristall Nacht genuine fears still exist. That despite decades of effort, we have not yet done enough to end the scapegoating, to end the discrimination. We have not yet done enough to make every citizen in Europe unafraid to be themselves and worship as they like. That – as we heard today, too many children still do not feel safe saying they are Jewish. Too many mothers still worry. Too many people still live with suitcases packed. Too many still without the freedom to just live as they choose without fear.

That is our collective failure and our collective challenge – and one that ours must the generation to meet.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a privilege to be receiving the King David Award. But above all I want to assure you that I receive this award, on behalf of the European Parliament, with great responsibility. It will serve as a continuous reminder of those heinous crimes committed against

humanity in the past and to recall the importance of speaking up in defence of our common values, today.

Earlier this year I visited Israel, marking my first state visit out of Europe. There I visited Yad Vashem where I emphasised the importance of keeping the memory of the victims of the holocaust alive and to teaching our children tolerance and respect.

But I am deeply aware that the responsibility that we carry must also start within our own homes. Holocaust deniers, conspiracy myths, disinformation and violence of every kind that targets and singles out members of our communities have no place in our Europe.

The European Parliament understands this. And as a symbol of our duty to never forget, let me reiterate my intention on having a permanent Holocaust memorial in the European Parliament.

40 years ago, Simone Veil held the same role that I hold today. The first President of a democratically elected European Parliament was herself a holocaust survivor. A former inmate at Auschwitz. For me this fight is not only institutional, but also deeply personal.

As I accept this award, I recall the words of Simone Veil “The holocaust is the heritage of us all” and pledge to honour the legacy of the Shoah victims:

By never forgetting.

By never being indifferent.

And by always, always speaking up.