



The Jewish community is once again ready to place our trust in Germany, our home

01.10.2020 | Josef Schuster

Speech of the President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Dr Josef Schuster, at the ceremony for the 70th Anniversary of the Central Council, 15.9.2020, Berlin.

When a group of Jewish representatives from all over Germany met in Frankfurt am Main on July 19th 1950 to form the Central Council of Jews, it was probably not a very festive affair. The founding members gathered in a private flat allegedly sitting at wobbly tables.

Today, 70 years later, it is appropriate to take a look at the setting of that time: In cities that had been destroyed during the war, Jews whose lives and families had been destroyed decided to found a Jewish umbrella organisation for the whole of Germany in the country of the perpetrators.

Both Ravel's Kaddish, which Daniel Hope will play in a moment, and our new film, which will be shown following my speech, nicely reflect the mood of the time. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the musicians Isidoro Abramowicz and Daniel Hope and the filmmaker Friederike Hirschmann!

Even though many Jewish communities were rebuilt after the War, I still marvel at the courage and optimism people had to start all over again.

This generation of Jewish pioneers deserves our deep recognition and ongoing respect to this day. They laid the foundations without which there would be no Jewish life in Germany today.

However, they did not found the Central Council of Jews in Germany expecting us to celebrate our 70th anniversary today. It was not set up as a permanent institution. On the contrary, the aim was to continue to help Jews stranded in Germany to leave the country and – as long as Jews lived in Germany – to represent their interests as well as possible.

Even though the organisation was not founded with a long-term perspective in mind, we must stand firm: The founders of the Jewish communities and the Central Council of Jews placed a great amount of trust in Germany.

Indeed, both German states – newly founded in 1949 – were permeated at all political levels, in the authorities, in the judiciary, in schools and universities by perpetrators, by people who had shortly before been agents of the National Socialist regime of injustice.

But it was precisely these German Jews returning to their old homeland after 1945 who still felt rooted in this country. That's why they were willing to take such an immense leap of faith.

Being here today, it becomes clear how firmly rooted Judaism was in Germany before the Holocaust. The pedestals of the columns between the rows of chairs and the arch of the bima behind you illustrate how large the synagogue here in the Oranienburger Straße was. The gold and blue dome of this once magnificent synagogue, shining out from afar, was a symbol of the pride of Berlin's Jewish bourgeoisie. However, only a very small part of the former building remains, which

now houses the administration of the Jewish Community of Berlin and the Centrum Judaicum.

At the same time, a great deal of imagination is required to visualise its former splendour. And thus this place also represents that which has been lost.

Anyone remembering the destruction of that time will agree with former German President Richard von Weizsäcker, who looking back on the foundation of the Central Council of Jews said: "To give Jewish life a home again in Germany after the atrocious crimes of the National Socialists – this must have been completely utopian in 1950".

The trust that the Jews had placed in Germany has unfortunately been shaken time and again over the decades and to this day. I would just like to briefly recall a few events:

In 1959, only three months after its reopening, the Cologne synagogue was defiled by right-wing extremists with anti-Semitic graffiti. A wave of similar incidents followed throughout Germany.

Seven people died in an arson attack on the Jewish senior citizens' home in Munich in 1970. The perpetrators were never identified.

In 1980 a right-wing extremist shot the Jewish publisher Shlomo Lewin and his companion in Erlangen.

Two years later, a 14-month-old girl died of her injuries after an attack on an Israeli restaurant in Berlin.

In 1994, the Lübeck synagogue was in flames following a right-wing extremist arson attack.

In 2000 there was a bomb attack in Düsseldorf-Wehrhahn, in which ten people were injured. Shortly thereafter, two Muslim men threw Molotov cocktails at the synagogue in Düsseldorf.

In 2012, Rabbi Daniel Alter was attacked and seriously injured on a street in Berlin.

And finally, almost a year ago, on 9 October 2019, the attack on the synagogue in Halle, where bloodshed could only just be prevented, but two people died all the same.

In his speech on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Central Council, then President Paul Spiegel – of blessed memory – soberly stated: "In the long run, the Jews' love for Germany has turned out to be nothing more than a one-sided love."

In his statement Paul Spiegel was referring to the period before the Second World War and the Shoah. Today we must ask: Is it still a one-sided love?

I would say no, despite of everything.

The affection of the Jewish community for its home country Germany is not a one-way street. The majority of the population stands behind us, as do the established parties.

And I would particularly like to emphasise the Chancellor's outstanding commitment over the years. It is an honour and a great pleasure, Ms Merkel, that you are giving the keynote speech today!

But all in all – returning to Paul Spiegel's quote – the love for us Jews could be greater. Or at least the respect!

This is something that is increasingly lacking. Thus a sense of uneasiness has crept into the Jewish community.

It is an uneasiness that makes one hide the Star of David on one's necklace under one's sweater every now and then.

An uneasiness making the mother caution her son not to wear the Israel T-shirt to school.

An uneasiness that makes someone go to work on Yom Kippur instead of asking for a day off and coming out as a Jew.

Apart from the serious anti-Semitic incidents, it is the small acts of exclusion that many Jews regularly experience that are worrying. Quietly we wonder how safe it is to live in this country.

For the official figures are also not encouraging. Last year, the police recorded more than 2,000 anti-Semitic crimes – a record number in the last 20 years.

And this year's statistics won't be much better. The Corona crisis acts as a catalyst in this respect. The wildest conspiracy myths are circulating on the Internet, blaming the Jews as having brought about the virus. The crude ideas finally show themselves in the form of unspeakable symbols at the Corona deniers' protests:

Due to the imposed regulations, demonstrators stylise themselves as Anne Frank. They see themselves as victims of persecution and attach the yellow star to their lapels, which Jews were forced to wear during the Nazi era.

Ladies and gentlemen

I know several old people who had to wear this star at the time. People who had to remain in hiding for years. People who only just survived. By the way, these people valiantly accept the Corona requirements and see no reason to complain about them.

I would be grateful if they wouldn't see this disgusting instrumentalisation of their own suffering at the demonstrations!

What do these repercussions of the Corona crisis, the conspiracy myths and the yellow stars show us?

They show us that 75 years after the end of the Second World War there is a lack of sensitivity towards the victims of the Nazi regime and a lack of understanding of the situation at the time. Ultimately, it is also evident that the Nazi ideology has still not disappeared.

Anti-Semitic prejudice is passed on through the generations – be it consciously or unconsciously. Nowadays such prejudice reappears in many milieus and many different guises in our society. There is always a sense that Jews are seen as something that does not belong. Today such prejudice is particularly often projected onto Israel or Israel is used as a scapegoat in order to perpetuate this prejudice.

As the Central Council of Jews in Germany, we see it as our task to name this anti-Semitism as such, no matter where it appears: be it in textbooks, in plays, in speeches by politicians or the works of a scientist.

Today I do not want to go into the anti-Semitism debate, which has been going on for weeks. But I would like to appeal to the spokesmen to take it down a notch.

Their interjections are not only noticed by other intellectuals, but through social media seep into circles which thus feel confirmed in their rejection of Israel and ultimately in their anti-Semitism.

And instead of investing even more energy into this debate, more thought should be given to how we can actually sustainably combat anti-Semitism, right-wing extremism and racism.

Following the series of murders by the NSU, the murder of Walter Lübcke, the attacks in Halle and Hanau and the right-wing extremist incidents in the Bundeswehr and the police, no further evidence is needed for the social ills in this country.

And as we are also celebrating the 75th anniversary of liberation this year, I would like to take this opportunity to let Shoah survivors speak for themselves.

In 2009, the then presidents of the International Prisoners' Committees of the German concentration camps published a text, which they left all of us as a legacy. It says:

"After our liberation we pledged to build a new world of peace and freedom: We committed ourselves to preventing a recurrence of these unspeakable crimes. (...) It is precisely for this reason that it pains and outrages us greatly to find out today that the world has learned too little from our history. (...) The last eyewitnesses turn to Germany (...). We ask young people to continue our fight against Nazi ideology and for a just, peaceful and tolerant world (...)".

We all want to live in a tolerant and just country. We must act together for this to happen. Today, 70 years after the founding of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the Jewish community looks back on the past decades with a certain pride. Just recently, we opened or enlarged Jewish schools in Düsseldorf, Munich and Frankfurt. In Constance, Koblenz and Dessau new synagogues have been built and are continuing to be built.

Today, 75 years after the Shoah, the Jewish community is once again ready to place our trust in Germany, our home.

It is in all our best interest that this trust not be betrayed!

Source: [Central Council of Jews in Germany](#).