

Commission First Vice President Timmermans lights Chanukah candles

On Tuesday 8 December, First Vice President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans lit Chanukah candles at a ceremony held at the Commission's headquarters in Brussels and made the following remarks:

"This year, we celebrate Chanukah in difficult times. Once again in the course of the past year Jewish institutions have been attacked. We have mourned members of the Jewish community, killed simply for being Jewish. We are appalled by the surge in Antisemitic hate crime expressed in physical and fatal attacks, and the increase of Antisemitic hate speech expressed online. It is vital that we tackle both.

Earlier this year after the horrific attacks in Paris and Copenhagen, I made clear that an attack on the Jewish community is an attack on Europe as a whole. For Europe, Jews are like canaries placed in coal mines to warn of danger. When the canaries start singing, all alarm bells must ring. The first sign of anti-Semitism, the first pogrom, the first persecution of Jews, always led to greater tragedies in Europe. So too must we in Europe be on the alert for intolerance that contradicts our fundamental values of equality and peace between citizens.

I am deeply convinced that preventing and combatting Antisemitism and antizionism is a matter for society as a whole. It must not be left to Jewish communities alone. It is the responsibility of politicians, mayors, state authorities, grass roots organisations, religious leaders, community representatives, the media, and every European individual.

The attacks on 13 November were like attacks on Jews in the past - an assault on our society as a whole, our way of living, our values. Attacks on the equal and the free. We

have always been in this together, but now our unity has shown itself to be stronger than ever before. The European Union is joining forces with all Member States to fight terrorism as a matter of the utmost urgency, and to prevent further acts of extreme violence.

Respect towards all individuals, their worldviews and their freedoms, is deeply rooted in European society. It is the foundation upon which Europe was built after two devastating wars. Everyone in Europe must understand that the fundamental laws and core values at the heart of our society reject Antisemitism. Like any other form of racism or xenophobia, it has absolutely no place in Europe.

Amidst all this, Chanukah – the festival of light – is a triumph. A triumph of freedom over oppression, as the legend goes. It is a triumph of light over darkness, a symbol that is shared by many religions around the world. It is a triumph of good over evil, badly needed in today's world. It is the triumph of mutual support over a culture of looking the other way. Chanukah is a celebration that symbolises unity and peace.

I would like to thank the European Jewish Community Center for organising this ceremony and for letting us partake in this Jewish festivity full of hope.

During this season of Chanukah, may you enjoy peace, prosperity and happiness."