



Message by Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission, to the Jewish Community in Europe on the occasion of the Jewish New Year

We mourn the passing away of former Israeli President Shimon Peres. A Founding Father of the State of Israel and a true Jewish leader, who devoted his entire life to the service of his country and the world. Tireless and courageous, he was a committed visionary for peace and a light to the world. Our dear friend and a friend of Europe, may his memory be a blessing.

As Erev Rosh Ha-Shana is on our doorstep, and the year 5776 comes to an end, I want to express my warmest wishes to all our Jewish citizens celebrating the New Year. I hope that the sweetness of these days, symbolised by the apples and honey, shall be reflected in the mood of your celebration with family and friends. For Jews all around the world, the High Holidays starting with Rosh ha-Shana is a time full of joy and happiness.

But in the spirit of Jewish tradition, it is also a time for reflection and assessment of the preceding year. How much of our expectations have we fulfilled, what have we achieved? We ask ourselves the crucial question whether we have followed the right path or need to change directions. In this self-critical assessment Europe and its Jewish citizens are this year united more than ever.

Europe has seen many challenges this past year. We seem to have taken for granted what we have achieved and seem to have forgotten from where we have come. The coherence of our societies Europe wide has not been challenged in a similar way in decades.

I am well aware of the widespread concerns within the Jewish communities. It is painful to hear that many Jews don't feel safe anymore to live, study, work and pray on European soil. And the security fears that the Jewish community knows all too well have reached society at large.

Many people in Europe are anxious about their future, the future of their children, about new forms of threat. There is a growing insecurity about a diverse society challenging our traditions and an uncertainty about our values which we did not have to define up until now.

Rosh ha-Shana provides us with the chance to assess critically where we are heading, how we can reignite a sense of solidarity and work together towards a society in which everybody can live the way they want to live as long as they adhere to European values.

Europe stands by its Jewish citizens and I, personally, together with the whole European Commission attach greatest importance to a thriving Jewish community in Europe.

Only a fool believes that one's fate is determined by luck or the horoscope, so we are taking concrete measures and have stepped up our fight and prevention against Antisemitism.

To ensure close contact with the Jewish communities across Europe I appointed Katharina von Schnurbein as EC Coordinator on combating Antisemitism last December. She has been visiting Jewish communities across Europe and relays their concerns, but also hopes and aspirations directly to me.

In Europe we have strong rules which criminalize publicly condoning, denying or grossly trivialising Holocaust denial carried out in a manner likely to incite to violence or hatred. We press for the correct application with those member states that do not yet comply and apply this legislation correctly.

This is also the case for social media. The Internet is no legal black hole. What is criminalized in the real world is criminalized online. In May, the Commission concluded a code of conduct with the biggest IT companies [Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Microsoft] in which they agreed to revise a majority of the relevant illegal hate speech flagged to them within 24 hours and remove it where necessary. Together with our partners, we will continue to address the deluge of Antisemitic hate speech on the internet.

Europe cannot be envisaged without its Jewish community, its Jewish history and its Jewish future. Future generations and newcomers alike need to understand the tremendous contribution that Jews have made to Europe over the centuries until today.

Europe wouldn't be the same.

Only by providing answers to the problems it can address will the EU stop being questioned and win back the trust of its citizens – the challenging task of national and European leaders.

I wish you all a happy and sweet New Year.

Shana tova ve'metuqa!