

EUPJ European Union Office Brussels Opening, November 2018

EUPJ Newsletter: Special Edition

© European Union for Progressive Judaism

Why are we engaging in Europe?

William Echikson, Director of the EUPJ's new European Union Office

The World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) numbers 1.9 million members. Within Europe, it is present in 17 countries and counts over 170 communities. Jews have lived for thousands of years in Europe, and we believe that a strong Jewish presence is central to the establishment of a tolerant, multi-cultural Europe.

The European Union for Progressive Judaism (EUPJ) officially opened its new European Union Office in

Brussels on November 10 during its Shabbaton, which was attended by representatives of almost all of its 17 member countries.

Why Brussels? The aim is to support the EU's outreach to European Jews. Without the European Union and its commitment to tolerance and protection of minorities, it will not be possible for

Jews to live here. We aim to present another face of Judaism to European policymakers, one that is open to the modern world while being committed to Jewish traditions and ideals.

This European Commission has done more to protect and promote Judaism than any of its predecessors, stating that only if Jews feel safe can Europe fulfil the goal of a liberal, tolerant multi-ethnic and multi-national society.

In June 2017, the European Parliament adopted its

first-ever resolution condemning anti-Semitism. Among other conditions, it requires EU members to

appoint national co-ordinators to combat anti-Semitism (it has already named the first-ever European co-ordinator against anti-Semitism), to publicly condemn anti-Semitic statements and to promote education about the Holocaust. It has pressed Internet companies to combat online



Leslie Bergman, EUPJ Honorary Life-President; Carole Sterling, WUPJ Chairman; William Echikson, EUPJ EU Office Director; Sonja Guentner, EUPJ Chairman; Gilbert Lederman, EUPJ & WUPJ Board Member, Beit Hillel VP and Co-organiser of the Shabbaton

anti-Semitism. It has rebuked countries for trying to rehabilitate Holocaust war criminals and minimise their own guilt. And it has unlocked millions of euros in grants to fight anti-Semitism and finance interfaith initiatives.

The European Parliament deserves praise for its support for European Judaism.



“Only if Jews feel safe can Europe fulfil the goal of a liberal, tolerant, multi-ethnic and multi-national society.” – European Commission

History repeating itself

Paul Nemitz, European Commission Principal Adviser and Keynote Speaker

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is important for democracy because it's not only about individual rights, it's about your ability to live out your political views and also your religion, if you want to, without being subject to surveillance where big companies or the state track all your activities.

This choice, to live out our beliefs, we must maintain it in the digital age, and if we choose we want to live them out in public, that's great, but if

we choose we want to live them in private, that must also be possible. So this law in this digital age, in which surveillance has become so cheap and so easy, is no small fry and is not a technicality.

But I am here not for the GDPR. I am here because at that time, I was a Director of the Commission for Fundamental Rights, and in that context, Frans Timmermans, the Vice-President of the Commission, appointed two officials in my department, one for fighting anti-Semitism and maintaining contact with the Jewish communities, and one to fight Islamophobia and to maintain contact with the Islamic communities and the Muslims.

Why? Because the Commission had the research from the Vienna office showing that political violence in Europe has been rising by 400%. We have an enormous increase in violent acts of an anti-Semitic nature and also of an anti-Muslim nature, and this is something, of course, that in free countries, in democracies, is of great concern.

Yesterday, at the commemorations of the Pogrom night, the Kristallnacht, in Berlin, the head of the Jewish communities in Germany, Josef Schuster, told the audience that on the night of November 9th, 1938, 1,400 synagogues in Germany were burning and 400 Jews were killed by Nazis, and last year in Germany, there were 65 fire attacks, arson attacks, on asylum-seekers' homes, and he said, "This cannot be!"

Josef Schuster talked about anti-Semitic violence, but he included all religious violence, the violence that is related to ethnic background, to where people come from, and he took a very clear position on this.

I thought that this was very, very important because learning from history in Europe – and I would say one has to learn from German history also, even if one is

not German – is important in the sense that learning benefits everyone.

I must say that I find it great that the European Union for Progressive Judaism is engaging in Brussels, that you're opening an office. This shows that the political processes going on here, the democratic political processes, are important for you and you want to engage in this.

And I think that in the state of democracy in which we are today in Europe and elsewhere, it is important that good people, intelligent, smart people, good-willing people who have strong convictions, engage for democracy, and engage in democracy, and do



"I think that in the state of democracy in which we are today in Europe and elsewhere, it is important that good people, intelligent, smart people, good-willing people who have strong convictions, engage for democracy, and engage in democracy, and do this in a visible way."

this in a visible way.

Let us remember that it is democracy that has won... we are the winners, we are strong if we engage, but we need to engage. Democracy and tolerance and fundamental rights are not given for free.



I think it is great that you are getting organised, that you've set up structures that allow you, together, to express your interests in this democratic Europe, and thereby, you are saying, "We want to be heard. We want to participate in the democratic process here", and I invite you to do this very loudly and very actively.

Frans Timmermans said that Europe is not Europe and is not worth existing if the Jews can't live here. But I can go a step further and I would say it's not that we look at you as a test of where we stand in Europe and how Jews are treated. But maybe it is a test, and I think this is what he means, but I think that it is good that you visit us... and with great self-confidence, engage in the democratic process and also on issues that are not strictly related to being Jewish, so that you show that participating in the democratic process is something that you can change.



L-R: Leslie Bergman, Paul Nemitz and Carole Sterling

By setting up an office here in Brussels, you show that Europe as a democratic process is an open process because of course, you set up your office with the expectation of being listened to, and by setting up an office here, you basically say, "They will listen to us".

And I will say, contrary to much of the talking down in the Brussels bubble, everyone is listened to here and you will have great impact and

influence in Brussels if you come forward with good arguments, and I'm very confident you will.

So it is important for European democracy that you engage here and I just want to bring you my back-up.

Paul Nemitz was the keynote speaker at the opening of the EUPJ's EU Office in Brussels. He is a European Commission Principal Adviser (Strategies for cross-cutting, justice policies or legal actions) and chief architect of its new GDPR privacy rules.

Haitian interns add diversity

A group of Haitian students from an hotel school in Port-au-Prince were in Brussels on an exchange programme with a local hotel school. The aim was to enable them to gain experience working in another

country and learning from their counterparts. Six students and two teachers from this group helped with serving food and drinks during the opening night reception.



Laying the groundwork

Sonja Guentner, EUPJ Chairman

This weekend is steeped in history. As we commemorate the armistice that ended the First World War 100 years ago and remember the “Night of Broken Glass” 80 years ago in Germany, inevitably, we think of the years in between these two events.

I may not be the only one in this room who thinks that some of the parallels to our days are frankly quite unsettling, not only here in Europe, but also in the United States. My thoughts go to the victims of the recent shooting at the synagogue in Pittsburgh.

We did not seek out the big historical dates when looking for a suitable occasion to open the European Union Office of the EUPJ; it was more a scheduling coincidence.

Standing here tonight, however, it seems to me that we could not have picked a more appropriate time for the largest organised body of religious Jews in the world to make a political statement in the heart of Europe.

Progressive Judaism is synonymous with full gender equality, with the ideal of egalitarian and pluralistic societies and communities.

I am very pleased to say that I am not the first woman to chair the EUPJ, I am however, in the more than 70 years of our existence, the first non-British European to serve in this capacity.

How is this relevant? About 200 years ago, Progressive Judaism started as a new, almost revolutionary endeavour in Germany. By the end of the 18th century, an increasingly large number of German Jews were as inspired as the majority of citizens by the ideas of enlightenment, emancipation and full integration.

These ideas clashed harshly with what was happening in their religious lives. Congregational practices were still informed by teachings dating from the Middle Ages and very much under the impression of very volatile and often hostile social settings.

Within a few decades, this was to change. New academic approaches were applied to study the wealth of Jewish traditional texts. Choir and organ and the vernacular were introduced to make synagogue services more accessible. Huge

educational initiatives were launched.

And most importantly, Jews, for the first time in their Diaspora history, were able to develop an identity of belonging. In time, they became equal members of society, with full rights and responsibilities. They served as professors, judges, civil servants and soldiers. By the 1930s, Progressive Judaism had become the majority movement in Germany and a



“It is our hope and wish to contribute to the topics of today a voice of reason, of compassion, of dialogue, uncompromisingly pluralistic and dedicated to full gender equality and social justice.”

large influence on Progressive communities across Europe. Judaism has never spoken with just one voice. It owes its dynamic – and quite possibly its survival – to the constructive discourse of many streams and opinions. For large parts of the 20th century, this dialogue could take place in Great Britain only. From its most important country of exile and refuge, Progressive Judaism returned to the Continent only hesitantly after the Shoah. To large international cities

at first and then, over the past three decades, to now well over 170 places in currently 17 European countries.

Tonight may very well be the most visible sign yet that it has been a successful process. After many years of re-building structures internally and in many ways re-inventing itself, Progressive Judaism opens up and finds itself ready to seek representation in the political capital of Europe.

It is our hope and wish to contribute to the topics of today a voice of reason, of compassion, of dialogue, uncompromisingly pluralistic and dedicated to full gender equality and social justice.

We are privileged to have found in Bill Echikson, the EUPJ’s EU Office Director, a most experienced and eloquent voice. Bill, you have the EUPJ’s full support. We all wish you every success in your role and greatly look forward to what’s next.

Pluralistic, inclusive, enlightened

Carole Sterling, WUPJ Chair

The EUPJ is one of seven regions of the World Union, representing close to 1.9 million Progressive Jews in over 50 countries. The EUPJ alone represents 17 unique and diverse countries. We have come together this weekend to commemorate and remember historical events, but perhaps more importantly to plan and build for the future.

Progressive Judaism is pluralistic, inclusive, a proponent of gender equality, dedicated to tikkun olam (social justice) and committed to ensure that ALL Jews can live meaningful, Jewish lives wherever in the world they choose to live. We strongly support the foundations of Judaism – *Torah* (study), *Avodah* (worship) and *g'millut chasadim* (performing acts of loving kindness).

Not all Jews wear black hats, as you can see by looking around the room this evening. There is more than one way to be Jewish – not only in America and Israel.

And although in most countries except the USA, we are a minority in a minority, you need to know and

remember that we are part of a thriving, growing family dealing with many similar and different issues and challenges, including conversion, patrilineal descent, circumcision and marriage. The historical contribution of European Jewry, and the



need for strong European communities in the future cannot be underestimated. The opening of this office is a very clear message that we are here to stay, and that our pluralistic voices and souls will be heard and counted.

Last Shabbat, we gathered in synagogues around the world for #ShowupforShabbat to honour the 11 victims in Pittsburgh.

This Shabbat, we are together having welcomed the month of Kislev, the month in which we celebrate Chanukah and miracles, in strength and unity as we dedicate this new office and our presence in Brussels, the

heartbeat of Europe.

This is an important and essential step in presenting

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and sharing the Progressive voice.

My heartfelt gratitude to the leaders for their exemplary leadership and for bringing us to this moment and making our presence here a reality.



Carole Sterling presented William Echikson with a special *mezuzah* for the new EUPJ EU Office. “On behalf of your global family, it is my privilege to present you with this World Union *mezuzah* for the door of the office. May it serve as a reminder to all who enter that we are part of a large, caring global family. We wish you every success as you take us to the next level.”

Progressive Judaism's EU role

Leslie Bergman, Honorary Life President, EUPJ

Some years ago, my colleagues in the leadership of the EUPJ asked me to explore the question of a presence in Brussels. I wasn't always convinced – we are an organisation of limited resources – that this was something we should do, but a series of events happened that persuaded me.

One factor was finding a partner in Brussels. Bill, who had been an important member in the foundation of IJC (International Jewish Center), a journalist and public relations person, well-connected in Brussels – this was the catalyst necessary for us to establish a presence here.

I have been on many visits to Brussels in the last year and a half working with Bill and I want you to know this is a man who does this voluntarily out of his love for Progressive Judaism and his personal belief that we should have representation here.

On behalf of our European Movement, I want to thank Bill for his dedication and really helping us move forward.

The question arises, "What is our role with the European Commission in Brussels?" Brussels is full of Jewish organisations all doing different things, all doing wonderful things, and what we don't want to do is enter into any form of competition. They do things well. We see no reason to try and compete... Are we the ones who are going to have a bigger and better Menorah on Chanukah? That's not what we're going to do. Others do it better.

When you understand what the European Commission does as it relates to Jews in Europe, there are two dominant themes. The one deals with Shoah-Holocaust commemoration and education, not only to remember what Europe did to the Jews, but also to ensure that, for the sanity of the future of European civil society, we do not forget the abyss into which Europe descended a generation ago.

The second is a resurgence of anti-Semitism., and it's not only about what it does to the Jews, it's what it does to society.

But let's face it, these are sad and negative themes. It's terribly important that we do not lose sight of the centrality of our existence as Jews in Europe and the role of European powers, which have been to make sure that these remain in the public eye, but it also occurs to me that there should also be space for bringing to Europe a message of a future contribution of Jews to European life in a positive sense.



And here's where I think the distinctive nature of Progressive Judaism has a role to play. I will take only two themes in which I think we are experienced, we have something to offer in areas in which others are probably not doing and are giving us some space to make a contribution.

The first is in the area of refugees. I believe that our synagogues and institutions on the ground in different countries are doing as much, if not more, than others. I'm not talking about actual institutions, I'm talking about the actual work of the communities. If you go into my own synagogue in London, the very first thing that

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greet you is a huge sign that says 'Welcome Refugees' because this is a synagogue that itself was built by refugees. They were Jewish refugees and it was the president of the German Jewish community who pointed out that we Jews must be aware of what we do to strangers so that we are not treated as the strangers that we once were.

When I collect my children from *Cheder* (Religious School), the moment they come out, a line of Somalian women refugees come in and collect clothes, food, etc, left there by the better, well-to-do parents of Jewish children. So we do this... it's in our DNA as Liberal and Progressive Jews, and I think this is something that we can bring in terms of a

positive message of Liberal and Progressive Judaism to the European Commission.

The second is an area that I believe has to become a future plan of Progressive Judaism and this is the area of sustainability. We have dealt well with the issues of gender equality, *tikkun olam*, the issues of “do not do unto the stranger as you will not have done unto you”, but let’s face it, we have been so successful that others have copied us, they’re all doing it now, and that’s great.

There is an area that is very Jewish and that is how we treat the earth in which we live. This plays to the strength of Progressive Judaism that we should not waste, that we should be aware of making sure that we do not contaminate the

earth. It is an issue that is very, very big in the minds of the younger generation – Generation Next – and I believe that this is an area in which we can bring something in terms of a Progressive Liberal ethos to Jewish life in Europe and to the attention of the European Commission.

So, in what I’m sure will not be an easy path ahead, we’re at the point of getting to know people and becoming known. This has not happened overnight, but just in the year that I have been



accompanying Bill on visits, people are getting to know what we do, what our particular theme is, why we could be different, and possibly what we can bring.

And so, my friends, I am very happy that we are having this occasion here, that we are represented by worldwide leadership, that Jews from many countries are in this room here, and that our future

efforts in Brussels, led by Bill, in future with some professional support, will ensure that there is space for Progressive Liberal Jewish voice in Europe, and I regard myself as very privileged to have been part of that. I am left with the following thought that sometimes we take so many things for granted. We meet as a European Jewish

organisation. Just think that 100 years ago today, a day before the Armistice, there were Jewish soldiers each fighting for their own Fatherland on the turf of Europe... so Jews were engaged in inter-European war, very difficult for us to imagine this, and I leave you with the thought that we are really privileged that we can meet as peace-loving Jews in a European union with a mission to bring to the attention of the European Union, the advantages and a particular message of Progressive Judaism.

Musical interlude

David Baltuch and Jean-Marc Finn provided beautiful music befitting a Jewish event. David told the audience how he and Jean-Marc believe that music is an important component of the Jewish soul, and they offered three short music intermezzi.

“First is my Baroque-like transcription for flute and

piano of the song, *Eli, Eli, she lo Yigamer leOlam*, a song about resilience and faith,” he said.

“The second intermezzo consisted of two melodies I composed on essential prayers of our liturgy, the *Shema* and the *Kaddish*. I see these two prayers as two sides of the same coin, one teaching us

to deal with life and the other to deal with death.

“Our third and last piece is also a *Kaddish*. This time, the version is composed by the French composer, Maurice Ravel. This piece is not only a tribute to the universality of Maurice Ravel and his ability to connect to – and be inspired by the Jewish liturgy – but also at the same time, a tribute to the universality of Judaism, promoting values and concepts inspirational for the entire mankind,” he concluded.



L-R: David Baltuch and Jean-Marc Finn

A warm Brussels welcome

Benjamin Dobruszkes, Beth Hillel President, and Steve Brummel, IJC President

The IJC and Beth Hillel communities are very proud to host this Shabbaton Brussels and we are very honoured to welcome everyone, said Benjamin.

Dreams can become projects. If this Shabbaton exists, it is thanks to the efforts of Gilbert Lederman and Bill Echikson. *Mazal tov!*

But if you want such a project to become reality, you need more people. And for this weekend, we were lucky enough to receive the help of many volunteers from both our communities, to organise and to manage a lot of concrete aspects. I would like to thank especially Anu Ristola and Jean-Paul Borgerhof, and all the volunteers who will help us during this Shabbaton.

Then Steve continued the welcome.

As we begin tonight the Kabbalat Shabbat service, I want to say, in the name of IJC, that I join with Benjamin in welcoming you, the EUPJ leaders from across Europe and beyond, to the IJC and to Beth Hillel, to our home in this building that we share together. We feel very privileged to be able to host the EUPJ Shabbaton here in Brussels.

The idea to hold a Shabbaton has grown out of the EUPJ's administrative need to hold periodic meetings of its Board and Assembly – and out of a preference for sometimes holding these meetings away from headquarters in London.



Steve Brummel



L-R: Carole Sterling and Benjamin Dobruszkes

This year, the EUPJ leadership has picked Brussels. Why? Well, I believe these meetings have never before been held in Brussels. It is also true that the EUPJ is impressed that the IJC and Beth Hillel have begun co-habiting and wants to show it off.

But there are two other reasons drawing the EUPJ to Brussels and these reasons are related. This weekend marks the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I... and to attend the opening ceremony for the EUPJ's EU Office...

The EU is a very worthy object of the EUPJ's attention for many reasons. But one stands out at this moment. The EU was conceived and established as a means to prevent another world war. That foundational basis should never be forgotten, in particular, on this weekend.

My wish for us all as we gather together and pray together is that this Shabbaton will be a time to reinforce the ties among our synagogues and strengthen our motivations to continue to build up the Progressive Jewish Movement in Europe.



WUPJ, EUPJ and ERA representatives stand in front of the magnificent Tree of Life at Beth Hillel/IJC

Celebrating Progressive Jewry

Gilbert Lederman, Beth Hillel VP, EUPJ & WUPJ Board Member & Shabbaton Co-organiser

“One building, two communities” isn’t just a catchy phrase. This is a reality for International Jewish Center (IJC) and Beth Hillel congregations in Brussels. Since last January, both Progressive communities have effectively begun co-habiting in the spacious and beautiful building of Beth Hillel.

This modern shul is a sophisticated religious, cultural and social centre where the content of Progressive Judaism is strong, deep, inspirational and timeless.

So, it was a perfect opportunity for them to continue the momentum and host more than 60 lay leaders and rabbis during a Shabbaton in Brussels, which celebrated the opening of the EUPJ’s EU Office.

Leaders included, to name a few, Carole Sterling (WUPJ Chair), Sonja Guentner (EUPJ Chair), Gordon Smith (EUPJ President), Leslie Bergman (EUPJ Honorary Life President), Rabbi René Pfertzel (European Rabbinic Assembly Chairman), Rabbi Edward van Voolen (Abraham Geiger College Rabbinic Director) and delegates from 17 European countries.

The Shabbaton took place from November 9-11. It was an important combination of

celebrations and consisted of a full programme of activities, including guided tours (to the EU headquarters with a visit to an important exhibition on *Nazi Propaganda*, and to Jewish Brussels) and workshops. Services were led by Rabbi Marc Neiger and rabbinical intern Dr Brian Doyle.

This weekend marked the 80th anniversary of “Kristallnacht” (November 9/10, 1938). During his *drasha* on Shabbat morning, Rabbi René Pfertzel remembered that 30,000 Jews were arrested in Germany in the immediate aftermath of this night, an event which marked the beginning of the road to the Shoah.

After Havdalah, it was time to celebrate the official opening of the EUPJ’s new European Union office. The office’s purpose is to give Progressive Judaism a presence and a voice *vis-à-vis* the EU Institutions.

The keynote speaker was Paul Nemitz, European Commission Senior Advisor and chief architect of its new GDPR privacy rules. Paul’s grandfather, Julius Moses, was the last Jewish member of the Reichstag before World War II.

David Baltuch on piano and Jean-Marc Finn on flute

framed the various speeches most beautifully with the traditional *Eli, Eli* by Hannah Senesh (lyrics) and David Zehavi (music), two melodies composed by David Baltuch himself, based on the *Shema* and the *Kaddish*, and composer Maurice Ravel’s *Kaddish*.

On Sunday, there were different workshops focusing on new trends in our communities, the future for Reform Judaism in Europe, the challenges of our

century due to nuclear weapons and global warming, state recognition of Progressive Jewish communities, the purpose of being a Progressive Jew, and interfaith dialogue and anti-Semitism.

We also marked the centenary of the end of World War I. Belgium was one of the key battlegrounds of that war.

The ‘Great War’ was supposed to be the ‘War to End All Wars’. Alas, that was not to be. Instead, it planted the

seeds for World War II.

The commemoration consisted of words of remembrance, prayers, a two-minute silence, and the lighting of a memorial candle by Jean-Jacques Speyer, whose grandfather fought in Belgium’s Battle of the Yser on the Yser Front in October 1914.

After lunch on Sunday, there was an opportunity to meet, engage with and hear from the EUPJ Board at their European Assembly and Open Executive Board meetings.

At these meetings, Sonja Guentner also expressed the EUPJ’s warmest thanks for the wonderful hospitality of the two Brussels community and to the attendees from 16 countries, many of whom had travelled to an EUPJ event for the second time this year following the Biennial in Prague at the end of April.

To wrap up briefly, this Shabbaton in Brussels was a unique experience, a great time to gather and to pray together. It reinforced the ties among our synagogues and strengthened our motivations to continue to build up the Progressive Jewish movement in Europe.



“30,000 Jews were arrested in Germany in the immediate aftermath of this night, an event which marked the beginning of the road to the Shoah.”

We can be the change!

Extract from ERA Chairman Rabbi René Pfertzel's Shabbat morning sermon

Clouds are building up over our heads and we do not see them, or we choose to ignore them, or maybe, we see them, but we are told to ignore them because we believe we are powerless.

And yet, we have the power to change the world. It is not beyond our reach, but with one condition only – that we trust we can do so.

Our Torah portion starts with these words: *Eleh tol'dot Yitzhak*, these are the generations of Isaac. Biblical scholars have shown that the formula *Eleh tol'dot* marks the start of a new narrative, a new section in the *Genesis* account. Each new narrative is a story of people who live their lives, who struggle with hardship, who endeavour to live an ethical existence and experience the ups and downs of this fantastic learning curve that life is.

But what they have in common is their continuous effort to take ownership of their lives, to fight for what they believe is right. This is precisely what we are doing here in Brussels in November 2018, the second day of the month of Kislev 5779, the month of Chanukah.

We are inaugurating an EUPJ EU office to make our Progressive voice heard in the centre of power in Europe. It is our own *Chanukat ha-Bayit*, the inauguration of our Progressive home in Brussels.

Despite the very sad occasions that we are commemorating together this weekend, we have the antidote in our hands. We come together to celebrate our European movement, to make sure



that, in a world that is increasingly conservative and self-withdrawn, a Progressive voice is heard.

Taking ownership of our narrative, speaking up and out against all forms of injustice, promoting a religious life that is in line with our Progressive values, these are but a few goals that as a movement we are constantly working towards.

We are commanded not to dwell on sadness, but to be forever hopeful. That is the main reason we are here today in Brussels, to affirm publicly our Progressive values as an alternative to the gloom of the time.

Taking in the sights

Two tours were arranged for delegates during the Shabbaton, one of Jewish Brussels and the other of the EU Institutions. A highlight of the latter



was discovering a memorial to Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli Prime Minister and Nobel Peace prizewinner, in a garden near the European Parliament complex.

Delegates also visited an exhibition entitled “Nazi Propaganda”, an interesting look at how Adolf Hitler used propaganda to win popularity. He understood the power of the press very well.

“Propaganda is a truly terrible weapon in the hands of an expert,” he said in 1924.

There are many leaders today who understand how to use propaganda and the media to their advantage. The old adage, “History repeats itself” seems more true today than ever before, especially with social media being as popular as it is – good and for bad.

L-R: Celia Naval, John Cohen, Miriam Kramer, Jonathan Wootliff, Bill Echkson, Sonja Guentner and Michael Reik

Executive Board meeting overview

Gordon Smith, EUPJ President

The Shabbaton in Brussels was an excellent, action-packed and welcoming weekend hosted by our two Brussels communities, Beth Hillel and the International Jewish Center of Belgium. I was asked to report on the Executive Board meeting held on the Sunday at the conclusion of the very busy weekend, but before doing so, I must thank again our wonderful host communities and their helpful volunteers for looking after us and caring for our every need. The food was delicious, the company was great and the atmosphere was friendly and hospitable.

After the excellent workshops and a scrumptious buffet lunch, we held a short European Assembly meeting in order to appoint and welcome Rabbi Menno Ten Brink as a Vice Chairman and Management Committee member of the EUPJ, and Miriam Kramer and Robert Weiner as Vice Presidents of the organisation. All their appointments were approved to deserved acclamation.

The Executive Board meeting started at 13.15 with much on the agenda. After the warm welcome by our Chairman, Sonja Guentner, we moved to the formal part of the meeting. Sadly, one of the first formal tasks on the agenda was the necessity to remove two of our Spanish Communities as members of the EUPJ due to the non-compliance with the EUPJ regulations.

This was an unfortunate, but unavoidable necessity and as Sonja stated, "We would far prefer to welcome new members to the EUPJ than remove them". On a happier note, we welcomed delegates from emerging communities in Oslo, Norway, and Krakow, Poland, who told us about their growing activities.

Presenting all the formal reports gave us the opportunity to mention the detailed report from David Pollak on the arrangements in hand for the planning of the 2020

'visionary' Biennial EUPJ Conference, which is provisionally planned to be held from May 7-10 in Geneva, so please mark your diaries accordingly and watch this space for further announcements.

It was also good to note the progress that has been made by the European Rabbinic Assembly (ERA), which is now a major force and our Progressive Rabbinic voice in Europe. The European Beth Din (EBD) has also had a busy year and on the Monday after the Shabbaton, a Beth Din Kallah was held to discuss the major issues arising out of conversions in Europe.

The formal part of the meeting concluded and we then moved to one of the highlights with a presentation by our Honorary Life President, Leslie Bergman, of the "State of the Nation" of the EUPJ.

Leslie and I had been authorised by the Management Committee to periodically review the Strategic Report we had presented at the Lyon Executive Board meeting in December 2016. Leslie presented an up-to-date review of the successes, some failures and the work still to be done across the region.

The meeting then concluded with a short brainstorming session on all aspects of EUPJ Communication, which was ably and kindly facilitated by Noeleen Cohen. Clearly there is much to do to improve both our internal as well as our external communications, marketing and public relations needs and the Management Committee has already started to consider and implement many of the practical ideas mentioned.

The meeting concluded at 15.00 under the able baton of our Chairman, Sonja, and the delegates then prepared for the journeys back to their various countries, tired but

also energised by the very successful and entertaining Shabbaton weekend in the beautiful city of Brussels.



Gordon Smith



Leslie Bergman



Noeleen Cohen

Remembering fallen heroes



Rabbis René Pfertzel and Pauline Bebe prepared a beautiful Armistice Day memorial ceremony after the morning workshops on Sunday 11/11.

Stéphane Beder from Paris read a poem in French and Carole Sterling, WUPJ Chairman, read one in English. Chazzanit Hannah Verhulst from Holland sang a beautiful rendition of *Adonai ro'i lo echsar* (*The Lord is my Shepherd: Psalm 23*).

Jean-Jacques Speyer from Brussels lit the memorial candle for all those who died during the 'War to End All Wars'. He also spoke about his grandfather who had fought on the Yser Front in north-west Belgium in October 1914. A two-minute silence was held at the end of the ceremony.



Clockwise from left: Rabbis Pauline Bebe, René Pfertzel and Hannah Verhulst; Jean-Jacques Speyer; Stéphane Beder and Carole Sterling



Rabbis who attended the memorial service. Below L-R: Rabbis René Pfertzel, Edward van Voolen, Marc Neiger, Pauline Bebe, Alexander Grodensky, Menno ten Brink and student rabbi Brian Doyle

Looking forward: What's next?

William Echikson, Director, EUPJ EU Office

We have now opened our Brussels office. The next step is to take concrete actions to promote Progressive Judaism and make an impact on the European Union policy scene.

On a basic level, it's important to wave the previously-absent Progressive banner. Sonja Guentner, our Chairman, and I attended the [European Union of Jewish Students'](#) gala for the first day of Chanukah on December 2 in Brussels.

The EUJS seeks to strengthen Jewish communities and European society through Jewish student activism and advocacy. This gala event brought together several hundred Jewish student leaders. We hope to send a rabbi and cantor to the organisation's influential summer camp.

At the gala, we sat next to the leaders of the [European Jewish Community Centre](#) (EJCC). I worked with them in the past to promote an exhibition at the European Parliament on Nazi Propaganda. EJCC leaders, Rabbi Avi Tawil and Nehama Uzan, showed enthusiasm for the opening of our office and a willingness to work together.

While promoting Progressive Judaism and our right in Europe to equal treatment with our branches of Judaism, we are not here to be a divisive force. We will work with all other Jewish groups to advance the larger cause of fighting anti-Semitism and helping the European Union protect and promote Judaism.

It's a challenge. On the backs of a disturbing [CNN report](#) showing a dramatic spike of anti-Semitism in Europe, the European Commission plans to release a major study on anti-Semitism on December 10. I expect it will also show a dramatic rise in this terrible and frightening sickness.

Rather than just complain, we will lobby key stakeholders, organise events and produce research. Our first opportunity will come on January 24 when we plan to launch a Holocaust Revisionist



Sonja Guentner and Miriam Kramer in front of the European Commission building

Report at the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels.

The European Commission asked us to produce an independent report investigating EU governments that were rehabilitating war criminals and minimising their own culpability in the Shoah. The EC wants to use the report as part of its Rule of Law campaign to make sure member countries respect core EU values.

My *alma mater*, Yale College, and another leading liberal arts institution, Grinnell College, financed the project and sent students to travel around Europe and research. As we move towards publication, EUPJ leaders are reviewing the draft reports.

As soon as the study is ready, we will share it with all of you. And we will continue to keep you informed of our progress as we tackle all the challenges facing Jews and Judaism (Progressive or other) in Europe.

May all our efforts see positive results.



Preventing and combatting anti-Semitism

What is the EU doing?

Holocaust denial and anti-Semitic hate speech inciting to violence and hatred is outlawed in Europe. The Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia was introduced in 2008 and its aim is to fight against illegal hate speech and crime by means of criminal law.

The European Commission is committed to monitoring closely the Framework Decision's implementation at the national level. EU countries were obliged to transpose this into their national laws by November 28, 2010. The Commission published its first implementation report in January 2014.

On June 14, 2016, the Commission launched the High Level Group on Combating Racism,

Xenophobia and Other Forms of Intolerance to step up co-operation and co-ordination to better prevent and combat hate crime and hate speech. It brings together all 28 EU member states, international organisations and civil society organisations.

The Commission asked the EU Fundamental Rights Agency to co-ordinate a sub-group that will work to develop methodologies for recording and collecting data on hate crime.

Katharina von Schnurbein, who was awarded the B'nai B'rith Europe Human Rights Prize 2018 at the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris in April, is the EC Co-ordinator on Combating Anti-Semitism.

[Find out more](#) about what the European Commission is doing in this area regarding anti-Semitism.

Contributing through education

A [Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe: CEJI](#) stands with individuals and organisations of all religions, cultures and backgrounds to promote a diverse and inclusive Europe.

CEJI works to combat prejudice and discrimination and to promote social cohesion through training, education, dialogue and advocacy.

A leading provider of diversity education and training in Europe, CEJI works through ever-growing

networks to offer a constructive response to prejudice and discrimination.

The organisation facilitates Jewish participation in European affairs, gaining recognition for Jewish experiences and concerns, and empowering Jewish organisations to become more internationally and inter-culturally active.

Committed to enhancing intercultural and interfaith understanding, CEJI is at the forefront of a new Jewish-Muslim dialogue and co-operation initiative.

Who's who at the EUPJ?

Honorary Life Presidents

Leslie Bergman
Ruth Cohen
Jeffery Rose

President

Gordon Smith

Vice-Presidents

Miriam Kramer
Robert Weiner

Chairman

Sonja Guentner

Vice-Chairman: Governance

John Cohen

Vice-Chairman: Finance

David Pollak

Vice-Chairman: Israel & Twinning

Michael Reik

Vice-Chairman: Education and Interfaith

Rabbi Menno ten Brink

EUPJ Rabbinic Assembly

Rabbi Dr René Pfertzel,
Chairman

European Beit Din

Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein,
Chairman
Rabbi Dr Jackie Tabick,
Convener

EUPJ's European Union Office

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This special edition was edited by [Darryl Egnal, EUPJ Newsletter Editor](#), with help from Miriam Kramer, EUPJ Vice-President. Photographs were taken by Darryl Egnal and Benjamin Dobruszkes, Beth Hillel President