

Welcome Speech by the Regional Governor of Attica, Rena Dourou

Greek Jewish Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day

Dear Distinguished Guests,

Dear Honourable Hostages,

“To forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.”

The great absentee’s words for the victims of the worst crime against Humanity ring in our ears.

Reminding us of the debt which keeps memory alive.

Especially nowadays, when we live in a minefield.

A field which is defined and delineated

by multiplying threats against Democracy,

by systematic attempts of historical revisionism,

by the recovery of many manifestations of fascism,

by the disdain for Politics,

by the attenuation of Education, leading to being ignorant of the Resistance history of a country that has experienced bloodshed in the form of massacres.

A minefield that is overshadowed by the persistent presence of anti-Semitism –

we have seen this recently on a banner during the Macedonia Protest in Syntagma Square.

“Jewish and Balkan MPs, you are screwed”

was written on the banner hanged by unknown people just a few metres away from the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier,

without causing any formal reaction.

Oh God, I hope we do not get used to it.

Besides, this is evidenced by the systematic desecration of Jewish monuments, like the recent act of vandalism on a Holocaust memorial at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUT) campus, and Holocaust memorials throughout the country.

This has been confirmed by scientific research,

including scientific research carried out by the American Anti-Defamation League and the University of Oxford,

which classifies Greece among the countries in which anti-Semitism is widespread and multifaceted.

Last year only, more than 18 desecrations of Jewish sites were recorded in Greece, which shows that the people who want to take us back to the Dark Ages are a long way from surrendering their weapons...

Ladies and gentlemen, it is not a coincidence that I am using war terminology.

Because, we are at war.

A war for the resignification of sacred concepts.

A war for the mind and heart of our children.

A war for Memory and Knowledge, which we must not allow modern Nazi supporters, admirers of the Nazi collaborators during the Nazi Occupation of Greece and death camps, to win it.

The sooner we realize that this is our, modern war,

a lasting war against Oblivion,

misinformation,

relativisation,

decline and obscurantism,

the more efficient our reaction will be in order to fulfil our moral, universal obligation:

to deal with the physical loss of living memory.

The physical decline of the last Martyrs.

The physical decline of the Survivors who imparted Knowledge,

maintaining Memory and functioning as the links between yesterday and today.

Following the last words of the well-known Jewish historian, Simon Dubnow,

just before he was assassinated by the Nazis during the Riga Ghetto evacuation in December 1941, at the age of 81:

“Write and testify.”

Thus safeguarding Memory for the future, not of a single community, but for the whole of Mankind.

Because the Holocaust concerns us all.

We should all try our best to keep its Memory alive.

Especially today that the far right is rearing its head, calling for greater vigilance as any attempts to establish Nazism in Greece and in Europe represent indeed a paradox reaching the point of schizophrenia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today in Europe, as evidenced by the election results of recent years, the ghosts, of yesterday and of obscurantism, those who unrepentantly admire and imitate the initiators of the industrialised death, are trying to determine the fate of a continent indelibly tainted by the Nazi atrocities.

They are trying to affect the European project.

Social Justice.

Peace.

The very thing that arose in the ruins of the Second World War from the need to protect European societies against the threat of Nazism and nationalism.

Those recalling the aforementioned times with nostalgia, seek today to create confusion, to spread fear once again and to make sure that ignorance prevails.

In view of this, assumption of responsibility has never been more relevant.

For today, just like yesterday, passivity, indifference and neutrality reveal complicity.

We, in the 21st century, are faced with a decisive choice to stand against the modern threat of fascism and anti-Semitism.

To quote Zygmunt Bauman, ‘the Holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilization and at the peak of human cultural achievement and for this reason ... a problem of that society, civilization and culture’, thus advocating a holistic approach for addressing the Holocaust in the post Martyrs’ period.

Especially, in our home country, Nazism and its supporters must be ostracized — whatever their guise — political, religious, social —, whatever their arguments for opportunity.

There is therefore a need to safeguard Democracy in our home country. It is our debt to shield ourselves from any attempts by the far right to attack the emblematic Democracy and the Parliament - inside and outside of it.

Unfortunately, some people fail to fulfil this obligation for reasons of political expediency.

However, the suffering of the 67.000 Greek Jews in the Nazi death camps, which is part of our own History, has drawn an indelible red line, in favour of or against fascism and all its forms, in favour of or against the value of the human beings themselves; a red line that cannot be subject to any political convenience of the moment.

Those who choose to remain silent or, even worse, those who seek to absolve the Nazi admirers from their responsibilities, as it happened in the 1930s and the 1940s, are wholly liable for their choice vis-à-vis History, Memory, Democracy in its birthplace.

“And if, with the exception of the killers and their accomplices, no one is responsible for their initial killing, we are responsible for killing them a second time” — the most notable absentee will always be present.

Thank you