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Open letter: we are all Greek Jews

Benjamin Abtan, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Elie Wiesel, Amélie Nothomb and others call on Europe to reject the extreme right

Open letter

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The leader of the rightwing Golden Dawn party, Nikos Michaloliakos, is sworn in to the Greek parliament in Athens on 17 May. Photograph: Orestis Panagiotou/EPA

The neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn entered the Greek parliament this month. With its swastika-inspired emblem, Hitlerian salute, reference to Mein Kampf, antisemitic and racist ideology, Holocaust denial, violence against migrants, threats against journalists and personality cult, the party is the lineal heir of the German national-socialist party that led Europe and the world into chaos and bloodshed.

Unfortunately, Greece is not the only country threatened by this revival of Nazi ideology. In Latvia this year, the president of the republic has for the first time supported the annual former Waffen SS march, in spite of strong criticism. In Austria the FPÖ, an extreme right organisation that nurtures Third Reich nostalgia, is favourite in the polls for the next parliamentary elections. In Hungary, the Hungarian Guard Movement, descendant of The Arrow Cross party – the former militia responsible for the extermination of Jews and Gypsies – terrorises Jewish populations and holds direct responsibility for provoking deadly attacks against Roma people.

This revival was made possible by the systematic attack by extreme right parties against the republican ideal that recognises that everyone belongs to the same national community, together. This campaign against "togetherness" is modelled on Geert Wilders' strategy for his Freedom party, launched in the early 2000s. The core of this strategy is to hide a rhetoric promoting race inequality behind a "cultural" fight against the so-called "Islamisation of Europe".

In this ongoing economic and social crisis, which favours a frenzied search for scapegoats and strengthens the fear of the decline of the "old continent", this strategy

has been revealed to be worryingly efficient. It has also enabled extreme right parties to support – or even to become members of – governing coalitions, normalising racist and antisemitic speech along the way. This new extreme right has also paved the way for parties which, just like Golden Dawn, can now legitimately win votes while openly promoting hate speech.

Faced with this terrifying situation – exemplified by the election of neo-Nazis deputies in the Greek parliament – we are asserting our solidarity: we are all Greek Jews.

We refuse to accept that on our continent, Jewish, immigrant, Muslim, Roma or black people might fear for their lives because of who they are. We invite all citizens, political parties, unions, civil society, intellectuals and artists to fight the extreme right by promoting and bringing to life the European dream. We must always remember that this dream was built on the ruins of Nazism. We must never forget about the Shoah. Our dream is of a continent free from racism and antisemitism. It is the project of a society based on "togetherness" – beyond boundaries.

To see this dream embodied again, it is urgent to put an end to two dogmas. First, we must refute the dogma of austerity which is responsible for terrible damage, creating the conditions that explain the success of populist parties, and limits the future of our European youth, sacrificed on the altar of perpetual austerity.

Second, we must refute the dogma of "the European fortress", which favours the spread of anti-immigrant speeches and the lockdown of Europe's frontiers, especially when a core element of European postwar identity – its social welfare system – requires the economic input of immigration to remain sustainable.

It is of the utmost importance for European institutions to renew their pursuit for democracy, social progress and the promotion of equality. Those citizens who, particularly in times of crisis, are the target of racial and social violence, must be protected. As Europe is undergoing a sustained assault against its core principles, we strongly believe that we must work toward a stronger Europe, right here and now. If we are not able to give life to the European dream, we are condemned to the same nightmare, in Greece and in the rest of Europe.

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