



## **Speech of First Vice President Frans Timmermans at the occasion of the EuroChanukah celebration at the European Commission on 8 December 2015**

I would like to thank the European Jewish Community Centre for the preparation of today's event.

It is a great honour for me that we are able to host this year's celebration. I would like to welcome the Ambassadors and Commission colleagues, and in particular colleagues who celebrate Chanukah. I believe in the importance of keeping traditions, also religious traditions in our societies, not only in private.

I would like to take the opportunity to introduce Katharina von Schnurbein – whom many of you know – in her new role as Antisemitism Coordinator for the European Commission. This is an important role to me. We discussed this with representatives of Jewish communities. They wanted someone to talk to directly. Katharina is that person. She reports directly to me. I take huge interest in this subject, because I believe it is essential for our common future.

After the attack on the Jewish Museum in this city and on Charlie Hebdo and the Hyper Kasher, we all said – or at least some of us did – it always starts with the Jews, but it never stops there. And since the attacks in Paris we have seen so many victims worldwide of terrorism.

Today we celebrate light. Light only exists if there is also darkness, but light is the only thing that can chase away darkness when it needs to be chased away, when it's all around us. And that to me, as a non-Jew, is one of the most important messages of Chanukah.

I also believe that we need to share this and celebrate this with more people, and talk to each other and listen to each other. The message is important, but the messenger is sometimes even more important – the one who takes the trouble to take the message to another person.

I am reminded of a story that a very good friend of mine, the former President of Israel, Shimon Peres, once told me. He said when he was much younger, he was in charge of the mail in Israel, and he heard this beautiful story about a young man who lived in one part of Israel and the love of his life that lived in another part of Israel. They couldn't see each other very often, so he started writing letters to her, on a daily basis, every day a letter. And after a couple of months: the girl decided to marry... the mailman. The moral of the story: nothing trumps personal contact!

And I think this is a beautiful story, because it shows that even if your message is good and strong, if you don't take the trouble of taking that message to the person you should receive it, you will not get the message across and you will not have a dialogue. This is what Shimon Peres tried to explain: for dialogue you need personal contact. For peace you need to talk to people you disagree with.

And one of the greatest challenges we as Europeans face is to start to understand why a part of the youth of our own society, born here, raised here, embraces a culture of death, embraces darkness, turns against their fellow citizens in their own society. Why they have not seen the light, have not been in touch with the light, have not been convinced that there is no need to embrace darkness, but that there is beauty in embracing the light. And that is the message we should also understand: that even if these young people might for now be lost to the light, there are thousands if not millions of young people out there who would be receptive to the message of light, and who do not need to be tempted by darkness if we bring the light to them.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, to me is the message of hope, is the message I see in Chanukah, is the message I see in Christmas, is the message that we should be celebrating in this season. And I wish peace upon all of you, and I wish that all of us will feel a strong responsibility to talk, to spread the message, to not give in to doubts, and to know that at the end of the day light is what brings us a joint future, light is what brings hope to our children, light is what inspires us most because it brings what our children need, and that is a world where peace prevails.

Thank you very much for being here. Thank you very much for inspiring me. Thank you very much for being part of what I believe is a strong and diverse European community.