



AMBASCIATA D'ITALIA

**SPEECH OF H.E. THE AMBASSADOR OF ITALY, LUIGI MARRAS
MAIN EVENT - TRIKALA, CITY CULTURAL CENTER**

SATURDAY 10TH OF NOVEMBER 2018

“Remembering the Holocaust: to stand up for Memory”

Excellencies,

Authorities,

Dear and very distinguished friend,

It is a personal honor and an official one as well, as representative of my country, to be here tonight.

I would like first of all to express my respect and consideration to the Jewish Community of Greece and that of Trikala and to their Presidents, David Saltiel, ton filo mou, and Iakovos Venouziou.

I was last week in the Synagogue of Athens on the sad occasion following the criminal and shameful killings in Pittsburgh. Without being able to understand Jew and because of my poor Greek I could not follow the exact meaning of the ceremony, but I felt – very clearly – that we are all, Jews and non-Jews, in danger. The physical as well as the inner liberty of each one of us is in danger if we do not stay alert, with our eyes wide opened. The danger in front of us, the hatred, the insanity comes from everywhere fanatics can breed themselves. And there are many ways fanatics can be breed. No one is born fanatic. You become fanatic the way you are raised and because of the environment you are in.

I could now try to say things and express, with a lot of personal conviction, thoughts the Jewish Community would express much better than me.

But I think it might be more useful from me to share with you some ideas from the perspective a Country which has the honour of chairing the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance this year.

President Mattarella, upon the invitation of H. E. President Pavlopoulos has paid what we consider has been an historical visit to Greece on the occasion of the last Celebration of the “OXI Day”. It has been a successful and touching moment for us. The two Presidents have honored the Greek successful Insurgence against the Italian fascist aggression and our common fight against Nazi-fascism. Let me recall some words of our President : “The new Greece and the new Italy were born from the Resistance to the Nazi-fascism and they rejected the War [...]. Today’s visit with President Pavlopoulos [...] intends to confirm the will to continue on the path of the common future for the European peoples, avoiding the faults of the Past” . This is why Remembering the Holocaust and all the horrors of our History is so important: standing up for Memory has to be our goal and, at the same time, the major instrument to defend ourselves from any drawbacks, from any loss of Humanity, from any distortion of the Reality, from any terrible trick to our consciousness, to any attempt to prevent us to look ahead. There is no “acquis” in History. No achievement is forever. We have to be the constant guardians of our achievements. It takes a lot of efforts and time to build. It takes no time to destroy. But signs of the dangers are visible very often much before the dangers. This is why we have to stay always alert, never underestimating, always analyzing and studying and detecting lies and nonsenses. Voltaire said it: “Those who can persuade you to believe in nonsenses, can convince you to commit atrocities”.

There is another meaningful episode in the relations between our two Countries that I would like to mention tonight because it is a lesson of Humanity and Memory. As long we will stand by Humanity we will be fighting anti-Semitism as well. I am thinking of the Oria Motor Vessel. It sank on the 12th of February 1944 in front of Cape Sounio dragging into the water more than 4.000 Italian Soldiers, prisoners of the Germans, on their way to Germany. The few Greek ashore tried to help burying some of the bodies (we were formally enemies until very few months before), stopped since that day using the waters where the wreckage took place, and started meeting every year on the 12 of February to commemorate the tragedy, to pay tribute to Man, to Humanity, even building at their own expenses a small monument. We Italians learned all this much later, only recently, almost by chance. What a lesson of Humanity and of Memory to us !

Let me finally recall our Consul in Thessaloniki, Zamboni – who has been recognized as “Righteous Among the Nations” and who helped saving Jews in 1943. The story of Consul Zamboni, however, cannot erase our responsibilities. We, Italians, were the first to come to Greece and then the Nazis followed.

The individual and the group he/she belongs to. Self-determination. Free will. The Holocaust has been a collective responsibility: the responsibility of those who have perpetrated it, of those who have assisted to it without reacting and of those who preferred to hide away. Are we now hiding away from something we should face ? There are times we are already doing this. What are we teaching to our children? Which is our behaviour today? The psychology of genocide, tells us how the conscience of the individual gets lost into the institutional framework. It is like creating a sense of responsibility that is transferred from the individual into “the Group” where it fades and, eventually, it is supposed to vanish (sometimes even successfully) but always temporarily, because the role of History is to keep looking thoroughly and sometimes temporary heroes turn into heroes with shades and sometimes even criminals. To resist this “temptation”, this pressure, the individual has to be “solid”. The psychology of genocide is the most negative expression of the psychology of evil, which allows each one of us – If we are not solid - to find justifications for our wrongdoings. I will not elaborate on that but I suggest to those who are interested to read “Moral disengagement” written recently, in 2016, by the renowned Canadian born American psychologist Albert Bandura. Education, Culture, Memory: those are all necessary elements to raise solid individuals. That is why we have to keep investing and constantly insist on them.

I am glad to have had the opportunity to collaborate with many of you on the occasion of the Italian chairmanship of IHRA. I have met new very valuable people.

Mr. Mayor congratulations for this wonderful city.

I hope that many young people will visit the exhibitions and that this city – which has so warmly welcomed us – and all of us will keep building upon our meeting of today.

Thank You for Your attention.