

## **Stadtrat Dr. Andreas Mailath-Pokorny**

Antisemitism is on the rise all over Europe – not only at the extremist margins of the political spectrum, but also in ruling parties. Nowadays antisemitism comes in different shapes and from different communities. Here in Vienna, in Austria, where we are very happy and proud to host this conference, historically antisemitism from right wing parties is the main political concern although we also acknowledge that different strains have developed.

Far-right antisemitism that led to the Holocaust is a defining legacy of our history. It has taken Austria a painfully long time to face up to the responsibility and to deal with history and this difficult legacy. In the early 1990s, chancellor Franz Vranitzky was one of the first in the Austrian parliament in Vienna to speak out and acknowledge Austria's role in the holocaust. By accepting this legacy, we are obliged to ensure Jews can feel safe and free in our society, that Jewish life and culture can be openly expressed and that the community is an integral part of the Austrian society.

All this seems currently to be at stake through the recent political changes. Some political actors are openly playing with antisemitic stereotypes, while most turn a blind eye to the subject matter. As a result it is necessary to increase the budgets for more and better security measures to protect Jewish institutions. Antisemitism is

lurking among Europe's resurgent, nativist political movements and wins elections. This worries me and many Austrians, too.

Political anti-Semitic campaigns and the resulting events must serve as a wake-up call. Acknowledging them is the first step. But more efforts are needed in education, and more scrutiny on social media.

The approach of the City of Vienna in dealing with the past has been very clear. We have been facing our past. The actions we have taken in the past few years and the developments speak for themselves. We have returned seized art objects to the rightful owners and heirs. We have installed projects of remembrance and restored Jewish cemeteries. In addition, many commemoration and teaching projects have been initiated in the past few years.

There can be no justification for antisemitism. That may be stating the obvious, but these days it seems that the obvious needs to be stated. Antisemitism is not only a Jewish problem, it is a problem for democracy, it is not "only" threatening Jews, it is threatening our democratic system. If democracy is to be protected, antisemitism needs to be exposed and combated much more actively. If Bernard Henry Lévy states in his recent book, that Judaism is strong, I want to add: And so is democracy.

I would like to welcome you most cordially, and convey the best wishes and regards of Mayor Michael Häupl and the entire city government of Vienna.