

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE CENTRAL BOARD OF JEWISH
COMMUNITIES IN GREECE Mr. DAVID SHALTIEL**

**INAUGURATION OF THE SHOWPIECES OF THE GREEK EXHIBITION IN
AUSCHWITZ, BLOCK 12.**

AUSCHWITZ, 2nd of MAY 2019

Your All Holiness,

Honorable Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament,

Your Excellencies,

Mr. Chairman of the City Council of Thessaloniki,

Madame Deputy Mayor,

Messrs. Representatives of Auschwitz State Museum,

Mr. President of the Jewish Museum of Greece,

Here, in the place of the absolute evil, my heart is clenching once more today. My thought is seeking the souls of my murdered brothers and counts their loss.

In this very place Heintz Kounio, from Thessaloniki, had to pass seven times the "selection", as Nazis were calling the screening. **Rafael Varsano**, another hostage from Thessaloniki, as well, called that a "filtering" in order to mention the "selections" organized to evaluate and determine who is going to continue working in forced labor and who would go to the gas chambers. **Berry Nahmia**, from **Kastoria**, was also here, in this very place, precisely in Block 27. **Bienvenida Mano** was in Block 10 - in the medical section of Mengele - enduring gynecological experiments. In this place **Duka Moissi**, from **Larissa**, **Naki Bega**, from **Trikala**, **Sandra Matsa**, from **Corfu** and **Jeannette Nahmia**, from **Ioannina**, saw for the last time their beloved ones. It is here where 20 year old **Shlomo Venezia**, from Thessaloniki, was purveying the crematoriums with the corpses from the gas chambers, participating later, together with other Greek Jews, in the uprising. It is also here that **Jacob Stroumsa** played his violin, being the fiddler of Auschwitz's orchestra, while **Salamo Arouch** was participating in boxing fights to entertain the Nazis. It is here where **Marcel Natzari**, from Thessaloniki as well, like the previous ones - selected for the nightmarish role of Zonderkomando - buried his memories into a flask, few meters away from the crematorium III. "I am dying satisfied because I know that Greece is now a free country. I am not going to live ... at least other people are going to live ... my last sentence is: Long life to Greece"! By these words Natzari completed his testimonial manuscript. **All**

these aforementioned cases represent very few indications about the huge tragedy of the Holocaust, the most heinous premeditated genocide in world's history. Just imagine that all these are evolving from very few survivors and from even fewer ones that wanted to talk about their humiliating experience.

An entire Greece -in geographical terms- perished in this place and in other places like this one. They were all exterminated and this does not form part of the Greek civic consciousness, unfortunately.

There are thousands of stories on Greek Jews and there are millions on European Jews, **which are never going to be disclosed because the Nazis cared in an absolute way that any human being be shrunk in just an anonymous number.**

Today we are all here to reverse this sad reality. Through this exhibition we are giving existence, voice and identity to the victims of Nazism. We are reacting against the outrageous Holocaust deniers, who violate the memory of the victims and perpetuate hate.

In today's ceremony, by presenting the showpieces of the Greek Exhibition in Block 12, I pay homage to the Memory of the innocent souls, perished in the name of abhorrence.

For every Jew, AUSCHWITZ means pain and mourning ... for the rest of the world it means RESPONSIBILITY!

This is the responsibility that the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament Mr. Nikos Voutsis, assumed with the seriousness and competence of a person who turns his words into deeds.

Following the unanimous enactment of the 27th of January as the Holocaust Remembrance Day (by the Hellenic Parliament, in 2004), **Mr. Voutsis cared, by his continuous initiatives,** that this day -since 2016 till today- be commemorated by the Hellenic Parliament. He also erected in the building of the Parliament a commemorative pillar on which the names of Jewish Parliamentarians, perished during the Holocaust, are engraved. He also adopted the delayed establishment of the Greek exhibition in Auschwitz, which thanks to his intervention, is now so close to be realized.

From this podium I would like to praise the efforts and the precious initiatives of all the institutions involved in this exhibition, starting from the Jewish Museum of Greece, its President Mr. Makis Matsas and his worthy associates and staff, the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the persons in charge of the State Museum of Auschwitz and of course the Hellenic Parliament and its Speaker Mr. Voutsis.

Distinguished guests,

In our days, as extreme ideologies are gaining ground, as violence and anti-Semitic attacks are becoming a dangerous daily reality in the streets of Europe, our hope relies on Education and on the force of reaction of institutions and society against any form of exclusion and racism.

This is why such initiatives, like the present Exhibition must be continued, enriched, supported and broaden. I hope that this exhibition will be transferred soon in its permanent site, in Block 18, constituting for Auschwitz's visitors a lesson on the history of the Holocaust in Greece.

ONLY WHEN MEMORY will become a LESSON and an EDUCATION, our hope for a better future will remain alive...

Thank you

Auschwitz, May 2nd 2019

DAVID SHALTIEL

President

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