



Publication: Ohr Torah Stone (online)  
Date: 28.03.19  
1/3



## “In Europe, antisemitism is in the air, and we have no idea what to expect in future”

*These are the words of French journalist Richard Darmon, who spoke with Ohr Torah Stone emissaries in Europe this week. OTS President: “In the very same place where Jewish holy books were burned, we are writing a new song.”*

By Arutz 7 Staff | 28 March, 2019

Approximately fifty rabbis and rabbaniyot from all over Europe convened in Venice, Italy to discuss Jewish life in the Diaspora. The discussions took place over three days and focused on how to strengthen the Jewish communities, Jewish leadership and Jewish life on campuses. The convention was organized by Ohr Torah Stone’s Straus-Amiel program, in partnership with the Conference of European Rabbis, the Hulya foundation and the Spiritual services division of the World Zionist Organization, led by Rabbi Yehiel Wasserman.



The convention, which was also a reunion of sorts for Straus-Amiel emissaries past and present, served as a platform to discuss the following topics: the connection between the State of Israel and Diaspora Jewry; assimilation in 2019; the dilemmas European community rabbis are facing today; the nature of contemporary discourse between rabbis and their communities; whether the rabbi-

congregant relationship is relevant in our times and how it serves the needs of this generation, as well as various topics related to the way in which Jewish communities in the Diaspora are managed today.

Amongst those who attended the convention were Ohr Torah Stone President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Dr.





Publication: Ohr Torah Stone (online)  
Date: 28.03.19  
2/3



Kenneth Brander; director of the Straus-Amiel program, Rabbi Eliahu Birnbaum; director of the Claudia Cohen Women Educators Institute, Rabbanit Renana Birnbaum; director of training and placement at Straus-Amiel, Rabbi Yehoshua Grunstein; the chief rabbi of the Jewish community in Venice, Rabbi Mino Bahbout; president of the Venetian Jewish community, Mr. Paolo Gnignati, and others.

Journalist Richard Darmon, founder of the French edition of The Jerusalem Post, met with the emissaries and talked with them at length about the escalating antisemitism in Europe: "We are currently in a 'twilight age'. The world is metamorphosing, changes are taking place and we don't quite know how to define them – whether as chaos or anarchy. There is undoubtedly a deterioration in Europe as far as antisemitism in concerned and we have seen a rise of 75% in anti-Semitic events. But beyond the incidents themselves, there is also 'quiet antisemitism,' which can be felt in the air. This means that even if someone has not experienced active antisemitism firsthand, the antisemitic environment is so tangible that it actually affects people's decisions and course of action – where not to go, what not to say, what not to wear and when to take caution."



Referring to the complex implications of European Jewry's sociopolitical situation, Darmon said: "Immigration has changed Europe drastically, and socioeconomic changes are also manifest as a result of the economic situation. This has great bearing on antisemitism, and we don't really know what to expect in future. After the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel said that we may have overcome the Nazi movement, but we have not managed to stop the antisemitic undercurrents. And at the moment these undercurrents are raging in Europe."

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander, President and Rosh HaYeshiva of the Ohr Torah Stone network said: "We are living





Publication: Ohr Torah Stone (online)  
Date: 28.03.19  
3/3



in the 'worst of times,' in terms of the rise in assimilation, as well as the escalation in antisemitic attacks. But we are also in the 'best of times,' one of the best we have ever experienced. Greater numbers of people are searching for spirituality; more people are making aliya to Israel and, with the advancement of technology, we now have an unprecedented opportunity to reach broader target audiences and learn one from the other. Here we are at a convention in Venice, where 430 years ago holy Jewish books were burned. And today we are sitting here together and writing a new song."



Photographed by Marcella Ansaldi, Director of the Jewish Museum of Venice

Rabbi Brander continued: "The vision for the communities, the schools and the campuses has not changed in essence: our role has always been, and still is, to build *mikdeshei me'at*, sanctuaries of spirituality. Synagogues and Jewish centers must not only serve as places of prayer, but must be centers of spirituality, where both the old and the young can find instruction and education, a place which promotes acts of charity and assistance and takes responsibility for society at large. All these are related to building *mikdeshei me'at*, small sanctuaries of spirituality, and creating different tracks for achieving spirituality.

"Together, we can learn one from one another, develop ideas and be a source of inspiration for our congregations. Together we can build our communities and turn the vision into reality."

<https://ots.org.il/in-europe-antisemitism-is-in-the-air/>

