

# OPINION: Why did dozens of rabbis flock to Munich?

European rabbis gather to strengthen communities, share wisdom and uphold Jewish life amid modern challenges

By **GAVRIEL COHN**

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Conference of European Rabbis (CER), in Munich, Germany.

This week I had the privilege to attend the Young Rabbis event of the Conference of European Rabbis (CER), in Munich, Germany, organised by Gady Gronich, as part of the media and communications team, led by Shimon Cohen.

Several dozen rabbis flocked to the Westin Grand Hotel, a plush accommodation a few minutes train ride from the city centre. Rabbis from Belarus, Switzerland, Greece, Germany, Italy, the UK, Israel, and more spent three days networking, socialising, and studying from each other.

They gained advice and organisational tips from keynote speakers and from their older, respected colleagues. My great grandfather, Rabbi Hans Isaak Grünewald, was a rabbi in Munich after the Second World War and himself a member of the CER. So, the event carried personal significance for me too.

Rabbi Joseph B Soloveitchik famously wrote of two opinions concerning the purpose of a rabbi. One of his rabbinic relatives thought that job entailed providing Jewish legal rulings to congregants. Another, his illustrious grandfather, asserted that the main role of a rabbi was to care for the underprivileged and vulnerable. At this CER gathering, both opinions could be seen in the work of the young rabbis of the CER.

These rabbis were deeply concerned that their communities had access to proper halachic guidance, in matters which have great application to Jewish life. One rabbi, who also functioned as a shochet in Istanbul, spoke of the strict traditions and practices he maintained in providing kosher meat to Turkey's Jews. Others spoke of their drive to offer Jewish education.

One rabbi delivered daily Talmud lectures in French, which took hours of preparation, unperturbed, to an audience of only one person. Another, who served in a country within the former Soviet Union, had only a single member of his community who could read Hebrew.

Many within his community struggled financially, so he was devoted not just to strengthening their synagogue attendance and Jewish engagement, but also to improving their way of life, helping them carry their material burdens. Many of these rabbis operated as a one-man rabbinic band in their communities and even countries.

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What drew the CER to fly so many rabbis from across the continent to a Munich hotel for three-days? As with every in-person conference these days, even armed with the amenities of Zoom and working from home, there was a larger purpose to this gathering. It enabled these young rabbis to remain united and inspired in their common effort to provide rabbinic leadership to their communities, however remote or actively engaged. As the Bible states, “to not turn anyone away”.

They came together to gain inspiration and support from each other, to appreciate and remind themselves that despite each of their struggles, they are not alone but part of something far bigger, a network of hundreds of rabbis striving for the same goals, halachic and pastoral, all over Europe.

This unity pervaded not just the Young Rabbis event, but all the CER undertakes. Publicly, led by its president, Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, is at the forefront of advocating for Jewish religious rights across Europe’s political institutions and press. He fights for Jews, from Belarus to the Balkans, to be able to have Kosher food, observe the dictates of Jewish law, and provide Jewish education for the next generation.

The CER stands united and powerful in projecting this message in the continent’s corridors of power, especially in this time of antisemitism and Israel’s war against terrorist states.

At the event’s concluding meal, one Bavarian official instrumental in supporting the CER’s new headquartered in Munich spoke with great emotion of his desire to help: “One suburb of Munich used to be called mini-Jerusalem, filled with Jewish people and communities. Then our past Government and population destroyed that. Now, the least we can do is help you build that up again.”

Through the Young Rabbis working devoutly for their communities internally and Chief Rabbi Goldschmidt’s efforts outwardly to Europe as a whole, they are certainly doing that, united and dedicated to building and strengthening Jewish people and communities across the continent.

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