

14 October 2015

Dear President Schulz,

As Members of the European Parliament committed to ensuring that elderly Holocaust survivors across Europe live out their remaining years in dignity, we write to ask for your continued leadership on behalf of efforts to provide justice and support to survivors and their families. As European parliamentarians, we bear a particular moral responsibility to promote the restitution of property unjustly taken during the Holocaust and its aftermath, as well as to advocate for the social welfare of aging survivors and the enduring remembrance of the Holocaust.

Seventy years after the Holocaust, many survivors continue to wait for the restitution of, or compensation for, property plundered by the Nazis and their allies. Now is the time to seek justice, while survivors are alive and too many struggle to meet their basic needs for shelter, food, and medicine. In many Central and Eastern European countries, the Jewish communities devastated by the Holocaust and subsequent Communist rule continue to wait for the return of communal property desperately needed for these communities to survive and revitalize themselves.

The European Parliament has been outspoken in its support of the restitution of private property to Holocaust victims and their heirs and the return of Jewish communal property, as well as social welfare for survivors and Holocaust remembrance and education. For example, the European Parliament has passed strong resolutions on restitution (see, e.g., resolutions passed on 14 December 1995, 16 July 1998 and 17 December 2003) and Holocaust remembrance (see, e.g. resolution passed on 19 January 2005).

The European Parliament has a particularly important role to play now that international consensus has emerged concerning the urgency and best practices for restitution of property and the importance of addressing the welfare of Holocaust survivors and ensuring the remembrance of the Holocaust. Forty-seven countries approved the Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets and Related Issues at the conclusion of the Prague Holocaust Era Assets Conference on 30 June 2009. The Declaration recognized the importance of returning, or providing compensation for, property taken from Holocaust victims, the imperative to respect the personal dignity of survivors and address their social welfare needs “as an issue of utmost urgency,” and the need “to enshrine for the benefit of future generations and to remember forever” the Holocaust. On 9 June 2010, forty-three countries reaffirmed the Terezin Declaration and endorsed guidelines and best practices for the restitution of immovable property. In November 2012, thirty-nine countries, the European Commission and several non-governmental organizations convened at the Immoveable Property Review Conference of the European Shoah Legacy Institute to reaffirm their commitment to the Terezin Declaration and review progress on returning property.

Letter from MEPs to President Schulz

The development of a consensus in Europe and beyond has created momentum for sustained attention by the European Parliament to these issues of importance to Holocaust survivors and their families. The European Parliament should continue to play an important role in encouraging member states – and states applying for membership in the European Union – to address remaining human rights issues relating to confiscation of property and to strengthen efforts to meet the physical and emotional needs of elderly survivors and to promote Holocaust remembrance and education.

We would like to ask for your support in efforts to seek the restitution of Holocaust-era property and for you to designate one of Parliament's Vice Presidents with the mandate to focus on the specific concerns facing Holocaust survivors.

Thank you for your continued support on these pressing moral issues.

List of signatories

1. Afzal Khan (UK, S&D)
2. Barbara Lochbihler (Germany, Greens)
3. Bastiaan Belder (the Netherlands, ECR)
4. Brice Hortefeux (France, EPP)
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6. Charles Goerens (Luxemburg, ALDE) **VICE CHAIR**
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26. Philippe Juvin (France, EPP)
27. Tamás Deutsch (Hungary, EPP)
28. Tamas Meszerics (Hungary, Greens)
29. Theresa Griffin (UK, S&D)
30. Urmas Paet (Estonia, ALDE)
31. Vincent Peillon (France, S&D)
32. Veronica Lope (Spain, EPP)
33. Hannu Takkula (Finland, ALDE)
34. Soraya Post (Sweden, S&D)
35. Claude Moraes (UK, S&D)
36. Syed Kamall (UK, ECR)