

Report from the EUPJ Conference

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Over the weekend of 26th-29th April, I was fortunate and proud to have represented our Australian Reform movement by attending the Biennial Conference for the European Union for Progressive Judaism (EUPJ), held in Prague. This was because of my relative proximity to the Czech Republic, as I was closing out my first year of rabbinical school at the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem.

To describe the events that transpired, the first evening saw the approximately 300 conference participants converge upon the historic Smetana Hall in the Municipal House for the Opening Gala, which featured guest speakers, musicians, and a beautiful video about the city we were sitting in and its deep Jewish roots.

The next morning, the learning sessions began, and during this time slot Deborah Blausten, a fellow rabbinical student from Leo Baeck College, Carole Sterling from the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), Reuven Marko from the Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ), and myself, worked together to run a workshop about intergenerational leadership. The activities in our workshop were aimed at addressing some of the barriers blocking communication between leaders from different generations, and opening up the discussion of how to bridge these gaps.

Later that day, I also attended a workshop about emerging communities in Europe, with panel speakers from places such as Rome, Milan, Seville, Warsaw, and Prague itself.

Shabbat was quickly setting in by this stage of the afternoon, so, after a brief recess to prepare, participants headed to the phenomenally beautiful Spanish Synagogue, a short walk from our hotel. For Kabbalat Shabbat, local Czech representatives, including my classmate David Maxa, coordinated the services, and it was profoundly powerful and meaningful to see them take to the *bimah* on their home soil. The next morning, Rabbi Aaron Goldstein and Cantor Zoe Jacobs from England led us in *t'filah*, with their considerable musical talents being a highlight of this service and truly filling the synagogue with the characteristic warmth and joy of Shabbat.

Several relaxing tours were offered on Shabbat afternoon, such as a river cruise of Prague, one with a focus on Mozart, and another on famous Jewish-Czech philosopher and writer Franz Kafka. I personally chose the "Jewish Prague" tour, where a foundational member of the Prague Progressive community, who also happened to be a tour guide, walked us around the old Jewish Quarter of the city, highlighting to us old

synagogue buildings, the cemetery, businesses, and living areas, finally concluding in the hall of the Beit (Bejt) Simcha congregation, the local Progressive shule.

The evening was mostly concerned with socialising, with a community *Havdalah* then splitting off into a Cabaret shindig for those who wished to stay, and an event at a nearby pub promoting the work of Reform Zionist group Arzenu, celebrating the work of some of their long-standing, dedicated volunteers - the pillar of such organisations.

The last morning of the conference was the Annual General Meeting, where a new Executive was nominated and voted in for the upcoming year, several items of administration were briefly discussed, and, in two particularly touching moments, an emerging community in Spain was officially recognised by the EUPJ, being put on the path to full membership, and the rabbi of the Progressive community in Geneva was awarded the Leo Baeck College Fellowship in recognition of his twenty-five years of dedication and extraordinary effort towards establishing and leading his congregation.

In case this didn't already sound full enough, around these workshops, panels, meetings and Shabbat observances, there were also plenary sessions from a wide range of speakers, on subjects from anti-Semitism, diplomacy, politics, the treatment of immigrants in Israel and also the place of Reform Judaism in Israel.

Finally, it must be noted that in the days before the conference itself, there was a rabbinic *kallah*, giving rabbinical colleagues a chance to catch up and engage in professional development, as well as an inaugural young adults leadership conference, proposed and implemented by two young adult friends of mine - the aforementioned Deborah Blausten, and WUPJ Board Member Andrew Keene - aimed at drawing together potential new Jewish leaders from all corners of Europe (with two or three Americans joining their ranks), to connect and learn from each other and enrich the already bright future of Progressive Judaism across Europe.

Overall, in a weekend of prayers, people and plenaries, it was an incredible opportunity to hear from some experts and forge new friendships from across the globe, which provided us with new perspectives and appreciations both of other communities and our own, as well as the hard work they invest into living their Jewish lives. I thank the Union for Progressive Judaism for their generosity in providing the chance for this amazing and unforgettable experience.