

PRESS INFORMATION

3rd PALAST-Talk: Holocaust survivor Margot Friedländer appeals for solidarity

Berlin, 3 February 2017



Christoph Hoffmann, Dr. Berndt Schmidt, Lea Rosh, Margot Friedländer and André Schmitz.
Photo: Dennis Weinbörner

At the Friedrichstadt-Palast Berlin, General Director Dr. Berndt Schmidt met with Holocaust witness Margot Friedländer, Grimme Award winner Lea Rosh, former State Secretary for Culture André Schmitz and TV journalist Christoph Hoffmann to discuss the necessity and opportunities to make a stand for peace, diversity and democracy.

“Try to make your life” are the last words passed on to Margot Friedländer by an acquaintance from her mother after she was arrested by the gestapo on the afternoon of 25 January 1943. Margot Friedländer managed to survive the persecution and war, first in hiding in Berlin and then in Theresienstadt concentration camp. Her parents and brother were murdered in Auschwitz.

Mediated by André Schmitz, who was State Secretary for Culture at the time, Margot Friedländer returned to Berlin from New York in 2010 after more than 60 years. “Today I can do something about the forgetting and speak for those who

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are no longer able to." As one of the final remaining Holocaust survivors still alive today, she continues to regularly share her memories with schoolchildren at the age of 95. The holder of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany appeals for mutual respect: "We are all just human. All with the same blood." In light of her horrific experiences during the Nazi regime, her humanistic attitude is both poignant and modern – and very much at odds with the growing national-populist trends recently discerned in Germany, Poland, Hungary, the Netherlands, France, Turkey and the USA: "I respect all people, regardless of their religion or skin colour, the language they speak or whether they are homosexual. The only thing that matters is that they are good people." Thus, it is entirely a matter of course for her to also regularly visit Muslim women involved in the 'Stadtteilmütter' initiative in Neukölln.

Lea Rosh, who was the first woman to present the political programme 'Kennzeichen D' of the TV broadcaster ZDF, expressed her dismay at the anti-democratic and nationalistic developments worldwide. She praised the commitment of many to express their concerns using peaceful means: "You do not remain alone if you put up resistance." Her life's work is her successful commitment to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. This was recently vilified by the AfD right-wing populist party as the symbol of a failed culture of remembrance with outrageous calls for a "180-degree turn" in the tradition of atoning for the Nazi era. "We can only solve the major challenges of our time across state borders and religious confessions," adds André Schmitz. He has been involved in exemplary projects for political and cultural educational work as chairman of the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe, which supports young people's development into well-rounded, politically-aware and responsible citizens.

2016 was also the year in which many learned to hate the internet. Insults, fake news and the intentional spreading of falsehoods, brutalisation of language in public discourse, and rise of populists and extremists; a great deal is in motion that it was not thought possible just a few years ago. "An evening for learning and for passing on how simple it can sometimes be. And how terrifyingly far reality often is from tolerance, altruism and mutual understanding," said Christoph Hoffmann, who has worked for RTL II News as a presenter since 2014 and is responsible for the 'Germany' division at the TV broadcaster's Berlin studio.

"Our history as the largest propaganda theatre of the Third Reich and our GDR past show that freedom is not just simply there and can be lost faster than you think. This is also why we always strive to make entertainment that reflects this attitude," said General Director Dr. Berndt Schmidt. The Palast is involved in the Berlin Tolerance Alliance (*Berliner Toleranzbündnis*) as well as the Alliance against Homophobia

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(Bündnis gegen Homophobie). As a theatre owned by the city of Berlin, the theatre launched the 'Colours of Respect' initiative in 2016 as an independent, politically-neutral statement for all those committed to mutual respect. The Palast already stopped inviting the ambassadors of countries where people are discriminated against due to their sexual orientation to premieres back in 2014.

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