

To Whom It May Concern:

In August 2011, shortly before moving to Brussels for an internship at the European Commission, I was walking in the main street of my hometown in Italy when I accidentally met a Jewish friend. As soon as he heard I was moving to Brussels, he recommended me to contact Rabbi Zevi Ives, whom he knew by attending ECJS events, saying that he hosted shabat dinners every Friday night with lots of young people from all over Europe. He was so enthusiastic about ECJS, I felt this was something I couldn't miss.

Despite the fact that it was in the middle of the summer, Rabbi Ives was indeed hosting shabat services and dinner at ECJS, and I was one of the many guests attending. I come from a small Jewish community, and all my life I had wished to live in a place with a stronger Jewish environment. Sitting at a big shabat table with young Jewish people from all over Europe and beyond made me feel like I finally found my place in the world.

My plan at the time was to complete my five-month internship and move back to Italy. Little did I know that three and a half years later, I would still be here, surrounded by amazing people that I met via ECJS, including my best friend and my husband.

When the High Holidays started, I feared that being far away from home would prove hard. However, Zevi and Sara Ives organised ECJS services and events for each holiday and were always there to support me and anybody else that crosses their doorstep. It was then that I met Nikki, an Austrian interpreter working in Brussels, who shortly became my best friend. Together, we decided to attend one of the "official" ECJS events, of which we had heard for a long time. During this event I got to know an American guy called Mark.

Mark and I started dating shortly after the event, and as our relationship developed, we both decided to stay in Brussels. After two years together we got engaged, and we recently celebrated our wedding in Israel, the happiest day of my life.

ECJS not only provided me with a Jewish, international environment, which I had been longing for; it also offered opportunities to stimulate my personal development. In the past years, I followed Judaism classes organised by ECJS, learning the most diverse range of topics from Torah portions to challah baking, and I was even offered marriage preparation classes.

Thanks to ECJS, I had the opportunity to meet interesting people, who sometimes stay and sometimes go. But Zevi and Sara Ives are always there for you, they are not only your friends, they are family.

I have an overwhelming feeling of gratitude towards ECJS for the opportunities that it opened in my life. As long as I had stayed in my small Jewish community, it would have been impossible to marry someone Jewish and build a Jewish family, have so many Jewish friends, enjoy a Jewish environment... In brief, I would not be the person I am today.

It is my strong belief that the work of ECJS has a high positive impact on individuals, and it is without hesitation that I would recommend its work to be supported in every possible way.

Sincerely,
Daphne Scherer