

17 June 2019

**First International Meeting of Special Envoys & Coordinators Combating
Antisemitism
Bucharest, 17-18 June 2019**

Excellences, Distinguished participants of this gathering,

As Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance it is a great privilege to be given the opportunity to address this meeting. It is not for the first time that I am allowed to speak at an event hosted by Viorica Dăncilă, the honourable Prime Minister of Romania. My deep-felt thanks for her hospitality, her endeavour and her commitment. It is an extraordinary honour to be in Bucharest, also because it was here that under the Romanian Chairmanship, our Alliance adopted in May 2016 the working definition of antisemitism.

One of the driving forces in the adoption process of this working definition was the then Chair Mihnea Constantinescu, who most skilfully led the deliberations. I would like to seize this occasion to recall his beneficial actions as Chair that not only comprised the adoption of the antisemitism working definition, but also included other successes like the valuable preservation of some sites about which the Alliance previously had yearlong discussions. I personally would like to stress how deeply I appreciated the action of Ambassador Constantinescu in the process of the whole Romanian nation to coming to terms with the darker sides of its past. A process that many of our countries had to go through and in many countries this process is not yet concluded. The fact that we had our second plenary session in Iasi, the site of terrible pogroms in 1941, is probably the most perfect illustration of how much these pages of the Romanian history were finally acknowledged. For his courageous endeavour, we commend this country and its people. Mihnea has left us all too early. He will keep a special place in our memories.

The presence of so many high-ranking governmental officials – among them plenty of IHRA delegates – is remarkable and shows the commitment that the fight against antisemitism is a key

priority for many countries. Unfortunately, it is also a clear sign that we – and by we, I mean our societies – still have to deal with fundamental problems that have to do with the core of what we regard as our values. Despite the horrors of the Holocaust, antisemitism is still there. Recent studies like the FRA report even indicate that this thousands of years-old form of hatred is once more on the rise. Its surge puts into question one of the basic foundations of post-war democratic societies. The fight against antisemitism is thus not just a fight for the rights of our Jewish citizens and compatriots; it is a fight for our societies as a whole.

The IHRA is grateful that so many governments and bodies have adopted this working definition of antisemitism. The EU Declaration on the fight against antisemitism of 6th December 2018 gave a tremendous impulse to the ongoing process of adoptions. The working definition is a tool that notably unfolds its merits in the context of police training, the reporting mechanisms, and the training of people active in the education sector. The IHRA appreciates and encourages sharing good practices on how to use the working definition in the terrain of everyday life. I am glad to see that the “presentation of best practices in countering antisemitism” is on the agenda later today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

IHRA’s delegates are profoundly concerned about the current trends of rising antisemitism and distortion. We as IHRA have a fundamental obligation to deal with the issue of antisemitism as it is directly embedded in the organization’s founding document, the Stockholm Declaration of 2000.

After the accession of Australia two weeks ago in Mondorf-les-Bains/Luxembourg, the IHRA now comprises 33 Member Countries. Our aim is to build cooperation between experts and policymakers and to initiate historically informed policymaking.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that no one who has met a survivor can honestly continue to deny or distort the Holocaust, but we will soon enter an era in which it will no longer be possible to meet survivors. It is therefore of great importance to find other ways that can help following generations to at least get a small glimpse of the horrors of the Shoah. Many different actors are working on this difficult task and I will spare you with listing the numerous initiatives that dedicated people all around the world are implementing. But we all know that a personal visit, a meeting, a first-hand experience greatly enhances our understanding of what is otherwise difficult to conceive conceptually. It also speaks to our emotions, if we see the places where people suffered.

The Member Countries of the IHRA and our expert delegates have done a lot to protect those sites – inside the IHRA and outside. But the work is not done yet, there are still sites which need to be preserved and made accessible as places for remembering and learning. Holocaust related sites have a role to play in the fight against antisemitism, now and in the future, and therefore I call upon all of you to help in protecting sites so that we can remember those who perished and suffered and to ensure that they shall never be forgotten. These sites cannot prevent antisemitism, but they are a tremendously important tool to explain what antisemitism and hatred can lead to.

Let me conclude by reminding you that the IHRA has agreed on another working definition that might help us in the fight against antisemitism. In 2013, our Member Countries adopted the working definition on Holocaust Denial and Distortion. This definition clarifies that “Holocaust denial in its various forms is an expression of antisemitism”. It is the first intergovernmental definition of Holocaust denial and distortion and it is a powerful tool for policymakers, researchers, and educators to identify and combat Holocaust denial as well as antisemitism. Distortion and denial appear across the political and ideological spectrum and often accompany a wide range of motives. It is high on our agenda to deepen a discussion among our Member Countries on the use of both working definitions. We will share information on how these two working definitions can help in the current political landscape of rising antisemitism, Holocaust denial, and distortion. There are few who still deny the Holocaust outright, but we are particularly concerned by the distortion of the Holocaust. We witness too often that the limits of what is acceptable to say about the Holocaust are being pushed in a dangerous direction and that false facts are spread, especially online. We have to address these problems and we need to raise the awareness of our judiciary and of law enforcement so that they can better recognize hate crimes. We have to get better at explaining and we have to better federate our efforts at acting in order to win the fight against antisemitism.

Dear friends,

Having listened yesterday at the Royal Palace to the welcome speech of the Prime Minister of this country and today to her opening remarks here in this hall, I cannot remain silent on one of her announcements and I would like to pay tribute to the leaders of this country with their project to set up a new museum dedicated to the Jewish life in Romania and the Holocaust. At our first meeting two weeks ago under the Luxembourg Chairmanship, the IHRA had lengthy discussions



on the preservation of various sites of suffering but also on concepts and contents of museums and educational settings that deal with the Holocaust. If at a given time the leaders of this country would consider that an expertise from renowned experts active in the IHRA might be beneficial, I am sure that the IHRA as a whole would express itself in favour of accompanying a project that we all applaud.

Thank you very much.