



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

## **13 May, 2015. Speech by IHRA Chair Szabolcs Takács at the 5<sup>th</sup> Global Forum on Combating Antisemitism, Jerusalem.**

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to have been invited to this very important conference and to have the possibility to address you in this panel-discussion on *“The rise of Antisemitism in Europe’s cities today”*. I am very grateful to the organizers both in my capacity as Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), and also as the Hungarian chair of the organization, coming from a European country, which as such is also one of the countries which is the focus of this discussion. As we all had to and every day have to so painfully experience, different forms of radicalism are on the rise in many European countries and societies. A phenomenon which we all have the responsibility to take very seriously, whichever form it appears in. A phenomenon, one of the ugliest manifestation of which is the hate and fury against Jewish communities, a once again rising antisemitism.

This year, in 2015 we commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of concentration and extermination camps of Nazi Germany. Allow me to start my address with a quote, that of a Hungarian Holocaust survivor, Éva Fahidi, who delivered a moving speech at one of the commemoration events. Her speech reflected upon the significance of having the courage to face the abyss of our past.

She said: *“At some point it has to come. Because much repeats in history, and if you don’t know what happened and what consequences it has, then it can happen very quickly again.”*

In my capacity as Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance I represent the only intergovernmental organization which deals solely with the

Holocaust. IHRA aims to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive, promote Holocaust education and foster Holocaust research. IHRA can claim many achievements since its foundation in 2000, the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which we celebrate this year. In a growing number of countries, education on the Holocaust has become mandatory in school curricula, Holocaust memorial days were introduced and Holocaust remembrance and research institutions were set up or reinforced. The formation of an IHRA Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial in 2009 was established due to the increase in antisemitic incidents. This Committee, chaired by Mr Mark Weitzman of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, also established the practice of including questions in the regular IHRA country reports focused on antisemitism and Holocaust denial.

In 2013 the “*Working definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion*” was adopted at the Toronto Plenary of IHRA. This definition (now available in 14 languages on the IHRA website) is the first intergovernmental definition of Holocaust denial and distortion and is a powerful tool for policy-makers, researchers and educators to identify and combat Holocaust denial and antisemitism.

The above achievements indicate that my country, Hungary took over a well-functioning organization from the United Kingdom in March this year. The Hungarian Chairmanship launched its program in accordance with the commitments of IHRA and the achievements of the preceding Chairmanships taking into consideration all challenges we are facing today.

Dear Participants,

Antisemitism poses a threat to democracy, the values of civilization, and to overall security in societies. Therefore, we should definitely also look at it as an international security issue. Many countries have recognized this, which is why intergovernmental bodies such as OSCE/ODIHR, the EU-Fundamental Rights Agency and IHRA have been granted mandates to combat it.

One antisemitic stereotype relates to the Holocaust and that is that Jews are being accused of “*Abusing the Holocaust*” for political and financial gain. This is why the fight against Holocaust denial or distortion of the Holocaust is one of IHRA’s main objectives. Professional Holocaust deniers are by definition fringe figures; however, they can nonetheless belong to the respectable parts of society such as politics, academia or journalism. Their aim is to poke enough holes in the accepted narrative, to raise

enough doubts about the key facts, so as to delegitimize the essential truth of what happened. Unlike other ideologies, Holocaust denial and distortion unites actors from the opposite side of the political spectrum that share no other views but their hatred towards Jews and Israel.

But who are these actors and what is their motivation? Who are we talking about?

In Europe I believe that at least three different groups could be identified as the ones responsible for rising antisemitism.

The European Union's 2009 report on antisemitism notes that Holocaust denial has become a central part of the propagandistic repertoire of **parties and organizations on the far right** throughout Europe. Holocaust denial has become a central unifying feature of different right-wing extremist movements. This creates a core element in the formation and cross-border cooperation of right-wing extremist groups.

At the same time **far left extremists, the second group**, do not have a record of outright Holocaust denial. However, it has become common to see extreme leftists trivialize the Holocaust especially in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to establish the practice to talk about "Israel" and for reasons of political correctness they avoid talking about "Jews." Many cartoons published in left wing publications or websites, however, could easily be confused with Nazi propaganda pamphlets, as they use the image of Jews (and Israel) aiming for world power. Moreover, this type of trivialization is often couched in "anti-imperialist" terms and as part of an ideology that seeks to be inclusive, multicultural and on behalf of the suppressed.

The third group are the **radical Islamist ideologies**. Historically, Islam and Judaism have shared a close relationship based on the similar values, guidelines, and principles shared between the two religions. There is ample evidence, however, that propaganda publicly denying the reality of the Holocaust has influenced minority expatriate communities, particularly from Muslim countries, now living in European states. antisemitism among these communities is generally on the rise.

It is also important to note that far right parties or groups and radical Islamists have a common feature: they are both Holocaust deniers, while left-wing antisemites are usually not.

**Antisemitism** appears in many forms, some less obvious, some very aggressive. The link between Holocaust denial and antisemitism is even more obvious if we realize that both radical Islamists and radical right wing extremists, like the Jobbik party in Hungary, deny or distort the Holocaust in order to justify their assault on Jews and Western democracy.

But let's not make a mistake by thinking that European antisemites are just crazy extremists. They are, but neither Holocaust denial and distortion nor antisemitism are phenomena only found among extremist groups. Especially via antisemitic views aiming against Israel, these views enter mainstream society and become more and more common and acceptable to wider circles within different societies.

Distinguished participants,

When talking about the alarming rise of antisemitism in Europe, we all tend to point to the horrible events in Paris or Copenhagen. It is certainly understandable because of the tragic fatalities. Nevertheless, I believe that we should never underestimate the seriousness of any type of extreme radicalism, whichever form they take, be it physical attacks against Jews, or hate speech on the Internet, or the strengthening of extreme right wing political parties in many European countries, including, for example the country I come from, Hungary.

And certainly, governments have a huge responsibility in how to fight them; how to exercise the zero-tolerance policy they say they are all committed to. The principle must also work in practice. First of all, high level politicians need to speak up and be very clear when they experience hate speech or deeds, when they see antisemitic incidents in their own country. But this is not enough. Laws and regulations must be there in every country, which penalize antisemitism and Holocaust denial. But this is still not enough. I believe that laws and regulations are worthless unless we enforce them also at the slightest event. And while all these are absolutely necessary, I think it is still not enough.

Law enforcement might help the fight against imminent threats of antisemitism; however, the only sustainable way of how we can curb the rise of antisemitic incidents is if we build a healthy society, where generations grow up with a healthy mind. And that is education and dialogue with our own people, which will be a long-standing and effective tool to prevent that the evils of the past should never overwhelm our societies again. This is where IHRA has a huge role, to urge member and observer countries to incorporate the internationally accepted teaching materials into their school curricula,

and urge member states to establish Holocaust education centres and museums which follow the internationally accepted narrative of Holocaust remembrance. To tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Distinguished participants,

Allow me also to say a few words about my country, Hungary. How we see what I talked about as Chair of IHRA, what we do and what we should do to contribute to our joint international efforts to fight antisemitism.

The Holocaust is a national trauma for Hungary; it is one of the most shameful episodes in Hungarian history. Hungarian authorities actively assisted Nazi Germany in carrying out the killing of 600.000 Hungarians. It is also a fact that the Hungarian Parliament implemented antisemitic legislation well before the 1944 German occupation. As the Prime Minister of Hungary said it in January this year at a commemoration event in the central Jewish cemetery in Budapest: „*The Holocaust was a tragedy for the Hungarian nation and an irreparable loss for Hungary, and the Hungarian Jewish community. (...) we were without compassion and indifferent when we should have helped; and there were many Hungarians – very many – who chose evil instead of good, shame instead of honour.*”

This tragedy was even deepened through the policy of forgetting and distorting the historical truth by post war communist regimes. It is also true for all those central and Eastern European countries, which are now free and independent, but were trapped for half a century after the Second World War, behind the cruel silence of the Iron curtain. Hungary and other European countries, formerly belonging to the Soviet bloc, now have the opportunity to do everything possible to prevent the evil from returning again, to face the responsibilities for the tragedies in the past, which should lead us to act in a responsible manner in our present and future.

Hungary, like other European countries also face alarming antisemitism. We can remain neither silent, nor passive about it. In times of increasing antisemitism we put this issue in the centre of our IHRA Chairmanship goals. During the Hungarian Chairmanship we will organize a conference in Budapest on the topic “*Holocaust related imagery and language in public discourse*” in November in cooperation with and on the initiative of the IHRA Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial, and in January next year

a Hungarian IHRA-conference on “*The Phenomena of Rising Antisemitism in Western and Central-Eastern Europe*”.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear participants,

The name Richter sounds familiar to all Hungarians, and might sound familiar to many, especially in a country, like Israel, which has achieved so much also in pharmaceutical research and development. Gedeon Richter was the founder of the now world famous Hungarian pharmaceutical company, the only Hungarian multinational, as we would call it today, which has become a global player without any direct foreign investment. Hungarians are proud of Richter, and proud of its products. But not every Hungarian knows the history of Gedeon Richter. The story of his life should become just as well known to all of us, as the fruits of his work – the medications - became household names. It is part of our Hungarian identity. However, selective remembrance of course is always tempting... It is easy to list the Hungarian Nobel Prize winners full of national pride. The names of Hungarian inventors, writers and sportsmen. But it is difficult to face the fact that many of them encountered persecution, betrayal, or even death in the country in which their names are proudly cited today. A nation is more than just an alliance of interests: it is also common fate. We belong together in good times and in bad. In glory and grief. Pride and shame. This why we cannot simply enjoy the healing effects of Gedeon Richter’s products today. And be silent that ‘yesterday’, only seventy years ago, a commando of traitors – with the approval of the Hungarian state – abducted him to the cellars of the infamous Number 60 Andrassy Street in Budapest. Stripped him down to his underwear and shot him in to the Danube together with his peers, Hungarian fathers, mothers and children.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Gedeon Richter was a true patriot. He would have been able to escape. He didn’t. He stayed. He stayed when the Hungarian Parliament adopted the Act on ‘*numerus clausus*’. He stayed when he was forced to resign from his position of chairman at the board of directors in 1939. He stayed when his employment was terminated and he was banned to enter his own factory. He stayed after Hungary’s attempt to exit the war failed and even after the coup of the Arrow Cross Party. He remained faithful to the country which became unfaithful to him. To him and to another 600 thousand of its patriots. But the reason why we must remember the whole history of Gedeon Richter and his peers, is not so that we can indulge ourselves in gentle grief only on one day,

the commemoration day of our national tragedy, the Holocaust. No. This may be necessary, but not satisfactory. We owe him more. We owe more to every single victim of the Holocaust and we owe more to ourselves. We must be better Hungarians, and better Europeans. This is the responsibility to which the destiny of Gedeon Richter – his achievements and tragic death alike – reminds us. Not only as diligent and faithful to our dreams, like him. But as uncompromising against bestial views as only a very few were among Richter's contemporaries. But the majority then remained silent and passive for too long. Until it was too late. This is the lesson and let us uncover the political camouflage. Let us uncover the masked players of our public life today, so that everyone knows who they face before trusting them with their future. Because that 'brighter future' that they offer is nothing else but the dirty past.

We cannot make the slightest concession to the successors of those who deported our fellow countrymen to the Danube shore. And to those, who spit into the abandoned shoes of the murdered today. We cannot remain neither silent, nor passive. We don't want to live in a Hungary, and we don't want to live in a Europe where clever, diligent and faithful Hungarians and Europeans like Gedeon Richter are plundered, humiliated and destroyed, but where they are let to live and prosper. To do something for themselves and for their communities. Every Hungarian knows the name Richter. It is our job to achieve, that every Hungarian knows his history just as well. Thank you for listening.

Toda raba.