



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

**7 March 2017. IHRA Chair Ambassador Mihnea Constantinescu
at the IHRA Handover, Swiss Embassy in Berlin**

It has been my great privilege and pleasure to hold the Chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in 2016 on behalf of Romania.

I would like to express my thanks to the IHRA troika and to my IHRA colleagues whose invaluable support has made this year a success: State Secretary Takács of Hungary, the 2015 IHRA Chair, Ambassador Benno Böttig, who is assuming the chairmanship of the IHRA, and Dr. Kathrin Meyer, IHRA Executive Secretary, for her guidance and support throughout my chairmanship together with the team of the Permanent Office.

And I am also grateful to our IHRA Honorary Chairman, Professor Yehuda Bauer for his continuous support and to our Advisor to the IHRA, Professor Steven Katz for his wise and competent contribution to our activities. I am also honored to mention how much I have benefitted from the active support coming from the long experienced diplomats Sir Andrew Burns and Ambassador Michael Baier.

Throughout 2016 I have worked closely together with the Heads of Delegation of the IHRA Member Countries, and was deeply impressed by all their commitment to Holocaust-related issues. I would like to particularly note my appreciation for all the IHRA experts from all over the world - academics, educators, curators - whose dedication to this dark period of history should be an inspiration to us all.

In particular this organization could not function without the Chairs of the IHRA Working Groups and Committees who, alongside their already challenging and important day jobs, work to ensure that the commitments of the Stockholm Declaration are reflected on an international level. Although my interest in learning from their activity could have been perceived as too intrusive sometimes, I am concluding this Chairmanship with a good feeling of cohesion, coherence and inclusion governing the complicated structures of the IHRA.

The IHRA Chairmanship is a challenging task for every country that assumes such a responsibility. In particular, for Romania, a country from Central and Eastern Europe that experienced several tragic periods in its history, including the communist regime, this responsibility has had an immense transformational value internally.

We are determined to continue the internal programs initiated under the Chairmanship, especially those regarding the education of the younger generations, for public servants, law enforcement officers, magistrates and politicians and to consolidate institutions so as to be able to confront and prevent antisemitism, racism and discrimination.

I do hope that the Romanian Chairmanship made a contribution towards consolidating the IHRA mission and promoting the IHRA profile in the international arena. Last year I dared to encourage our “IHRA community” to assume a more active role in confronting current challenges in the world in connection to our mission. At the beginning of this year I was very proud to find that the IHRA is able to shape what I would call “historically-informed policy making” so needed in our world today.

As we have witnessed in recent years, challenges such as antisemitism and Holocaust denial continue to threaten the security of contemporary societies. From the Holocaust, the world can understand what happens when these problems are not internationally addressed.

There are many topics we have focused on in the last year but two of them will always remain close to my heart. The first is the IHRA working definition of antisemitism, and I hope on strengthening its application inside the IHRA Member Countries and on consolidating the international support for it. The later refers to the endangered memorial sites commemorating and honoring the Holocaust victims, and I hope the IHRA will continue to challenge governments to assume the protection and their appropriate restoration.

As we are here in Berlin, I would like to take this opportunity commend the efforts and the strong commitment of the German former OSCE Chairmanship to promote the endorsement by OSCE of the working definition of antisemitism.

I am grateful to the team of the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, led by the former federal minister Frank Walter Steinmeier, the present President, for the continuous efforts to advance a consensus on this matter.

Although the OSCE decision was regretfully impeded by some positions which are difficult to reconcile with the democratic nature of the IHRA community, I am grateful to all EU member states for their common stance in supporting the adoption of the d working definition. This is a commendable and worthy achievement for all the EU members and on behalf of the IHRA I express our praise and appreciation to each of them.

There is a fundamental lesson about history I had the chance to learn from our IHRA community in the last year: While history does not repeat itself in exactly the same way – there are parallels.

Two weeks ago I was delighted to see a joint conference on refugee policies held by IHRA together with the Holy See in Rome. If I may say, it was not only a very timely and unique event but was an event with historical significance. It highlighted research on Holocaust-era refugee policies and also helped us reflect on the contemporary relevance of these experiences. A publication is planned for 2018 but I would very much like to see the IHRA and the Holy See continuing to strengthen their relationship.

Last but not least, I have a very pleasant last task as IHRA Chair. I would like to mention a ground-breaking IHRA publication, entitled **“Research in Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust. Dialogue Beyond Borders”**. It has just come off the press at the Metropol Verlag and so it is my pleasure to draw your attention to this volume.

This is a forward-looking research project, and this publication is an open call to researchers and governments to further develop this research: to learn more, to reflect more and to teach better. Previously, educational research on this topic stopped at national borders but the IHRA seized the opportunity to reflect on different approaches in different national contexts.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank very warmly Monique Eckmann, Chair of the IHRA's Steering Committee on Education Research, for her work. I also extend my warm thanks to all members of her Steering Committee for supporting this endeavor.

With this publication, you have brought the IHRA one step closer to honoring its commitment, enshrined in the Stockholm Declaration, to promote education about the Holocaust in our schools, universities and communities.

Before I hand over to Ambassador Benno Baettig, allow me to finish my speech with the words of a great historian and countryman, Elie Wiesel, who we lost last year, during the Romanian Chairmanship.

“We have to go into the despair and go beyond it, by working and doing for somebody else, by using it for something else.”

Let us not despair.

Let us work towards something else – and let that something else be a world that remembers the Holocaust in all its dimensions and its consequences for a better present day and for a better future.

I welcome the Swiss Chairmanship to IHRA and I am confident ambassador Benno Bättig as the new Chair will ensure a successful continuation of the IHRA mission.