



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

22 April, 2015. IHRA Chair Szabolcs Takacs at the panel discussion in the House of Lords in London.

In Stockholm in the year 2000, the representatives of 46 governments, including 23 Heads of State or Prime Ministers, and 14 Deputy Prime Ministers or Ministers came together to further international cooperation on Holocaust-related issues. This marks a defining moment in the history of Holocaust remembrance, research and education; never before had this issue been put on the political agenda. Never before had it been made so clear that governments, not individual communities, have a responsibility **to ensure that the horrors of the Holocaust are never forgotten.** Remembrance, which had so long been the duty of a few, was now the task of many.

We share a commitment to encourage the study of the Holocaust in all its dimensions.

We share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honour those who stood against it.

During the past chairmanships IHRA made considerable progress and carried out substantial changes in its working methods in order to realize its objectives and improve its reputation. The UK Chairmanship defined ambitious goals in a White Paper, which was a strong basis for the compilation of our program. With regard to education, IHRA set professional and widely acknowledged standards which had and still have a very beneficial impact on the elaboration of school curricula in Hungary.

Hungary took over a well-functioning organization from the United Kingdom. At this point I would like to reiterate **my special thanks to Sir Andrew Burns** with whom we were able to establish an excellent working relationship.

It was under the British Chairmanship that IHRA has been able to accomplish many achievements, namely:

- the reaffirmation of the Stockholm Declaration
- Granting observer status to Albania, and also to El Salvador and Moldova
- a closer cooperation with the Vatican started
- Addressing in a constructive way some of the challenges we were facing, like rising antisemitism and extremism throughout Europe.

The **HU Chairmanship started a program with full respect for the achievements of the preceding Chairmanships** and taking into consideration all challenges we are facing today.

In order to enhance and improve the ownership and responsibility of its member states, Hungary tries to encourage them to be more active in IHRA related matters. Making use of Hungary's good bilateral relation to **Serbia**, we contacted the Serbian IHRA delegation and discussed the possibilities of a closer Serbian involvement in IHRA-related activities. During these the Serbian side showed interest and openness in this respect.

At the end of May I plan to pay a visit to the **Ukraine** in order to examine how to bring the Ukraine closer to the IHRA. We consider the outreach to the Ukraine very important especially given its present geopolitical situation and past role in the Holocaust in all of its aspects.

Given the availability of the **Vatican's** liaison official in the personality of Father Norbert Hofmann, we will invite him to the 1st plenary meeting in June.

Ladies and Gentlemen! The moral basis for our commitments and objectives as Chair of IHRA is closely linked to our undertakings and achievements we as Hungary did and have been doing in the field of Holocaust remembrance including taking responsibility for the past and for the future. **For Hungary the tragedy of the Holocaust was a national trauma**, it is one of the most shameful episodes of Hungarian history: the Hungarian state assisted Nazi Germany to carry out the final solution. This trauma was even deepened through the policy of forgetting and distorting the historical truth by post war communist regimes. Hungary is therefore even more committed to revealing the truth of the past and to facing its details and to doing everything to prevent the evil from coming back to our life again.

That is why, I can assure you, that the objectives and commitments of IHRA coincide with those of Hungary itself in a coherent manner.

The Hungarian government is aware of the importance of the **fight against antisemitism**. According to Minister Lázár, who stated on the Memorial Day of the Hungarian victims of the Holocaust, *"Today we must not remain silent and passive in the face of vicious ideologies in Hungary. After what happened in the winter of*

1944 on the banks of the Danube in Pest or at Auschwitz, in the Hungarian language anti-Semitic or anti-Roma insults can never be harmless.” In combating antisemitism, the Government focuses on both law enforcement and legal tools; Holocaust denial and the incitement to hatred became a **criminal act**. Courts already took decisions in cases of Holocaust denial even if the crime was an indirect diminishing of the Holocaust. In the last case the perpetrator, a member of the body of representatives in Debrecen was punished with a 3000 EUR fine or imprisonment by the Debrecen municipal court.

We think that Holocaust education, remembrance and research best serve the cause of combating antisemitism. We consider **education** can contribute the most to establishing a way of thinking that prevents people from acting and speaking with hatred against groups of people different from them. One of the main priorities of the Hungarian Chairmanship is Holocaust education. The Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development has recently been tasked to carry out a survey on stereotypes of Holocaust-related questions among Hungarian teachers.

Antisemitism unfortunately is on the rise across Europe once again. The terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen this year were subsequent to a string of deadly assaults on Jews across the continent. In times of increasing antisemitism and violence in the world, we need to turn our attention to the fight against antisemitism the most. That is why we put this issue in the center of our Chairmanship goals. Within a few weeks I will participate and deliver a speech in the panel discussion entitled “*The rise of anti-Semitism in Europe’s cities today: means of response*” at the 5th Global Forum on combating antisemitism in Jerusalem. During the Hungarian Chairmanship we will organize academic conference in Budapest on the topic *Holocaust-related imagery and language in public discourse* in November 2015 in cooperation with the IHRA Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial, and in January next year another conference on “*The Phenomena of Rising Anti-Semitism in Western and Central-Eastern Europe*”.

As anti-Roma attitudes are also on the rise especially in Central European countries with a great **Roma** population, including Hungary, the Roma genocide and the situation of the Roma is also in the foreground of our Chairmanship agenda. We intend to organize a conference on the issue at the end of our Chairmanship period.

Having the 3rd largest **Jewish community in Europe** (after the UK and France) the Hungarian government feels responsibility to foster Hungarian Jewish life and cultural heritage. In 2014 it started a very comprehensive Jewish cemetery and synagogue reconstruction project with the wider aim to involve students and local civil society to enhance their awareness of Jewish cultural and historical heritage. The Government is also keen to maintain a framework of strong cooperation and consultation with the Hungarian Jewish community and its organizations. The main

forum of it is the roundtable meetings convened every 2-3 months in order to discuss all relevant issues of mutual interest. Through bringing Hungarian Jewish life closer to the international community we would also like to show that Hungary is a safe place for the Jewish community, while our intention remains to make it even safer.

The Hungarian Chairmanship seeks to deal with the Holocaust and related issues in a wide and comprehensive perspective. By doing that we try to address the past from which it comes and the future to which it may lead if we are not careful. As Mr. Göran Persson said about IHRA: "*We started something, we don't know where it will lead but we must do it. Because if we don't, then we fail in our basic human responsibility.*" **These words of the then Swedish Prime Minister remains valid for the Hungarian Chairmanship, as well.**

Thank you for your attention.