

Keynote Speech by Mr. Szabolcs Takács, State Secretary at the Prime Minister's Office at the IHRA handover, Berlin, 9 March, 2015

Welcoming and appreciation remarks

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour to be able to address you all today as Hungary assumes the Chairmanship of IHRA. It is a particular pleasure to welcome among us:

- **Sir Andrew Burns**, UK Chairman of IHRA, Special Envoy of the British Government for Post-Holocaust issues.
- **Mr. Mihnea Constantinescu**, Ambassador and special representative of the Government of Romania, who will be assuming the Chairmanship of IHRA in 2016, and the Romanian delegation.
- **Ms. Kathrin Meyer**, Executive Secretary of IHRA, and her magnificent and hard working team. I would like to express my gratitude for all their valuable and indispensable support.
- I would also like to thank the Ambassador of Hungary in Berlin **Mr. József Czukor**, who unfortunately can not be present today and takes part at an extraordinary ambassador's meeting in Budapest; we are grateful to the Deputy Head of Mission **Mrs. Katalin Karsai** and our colleagues at the embassy for their cooperation, hospitality and the possibility offered to hold this festive event here on the premises of the Embassy.
- I am very glad to welcome with great respect **Mr. János Forgács**, a Hungarian Jewish citizen and a former deportee to Auschwitz-Birkenau, who will also address the audience today. We are pleased that he accepted our invitation in order to tell his personal story. This year, in 2015 we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, which has become a symbol of the Holocaust and of the atrocities of World War II.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please, allow me now to introduce the members of the Hungarian Delegation who are present today:

- The Head of the Delegation **Mr. Vince Szalay-Bobrovniczky** is Deputy State Secretary at the Prime Minister's Office, former Ambassador of Hungary in Vienna.
- Deputy Head of Delegation **Mr. Csaba Latorcai**, Deputy State Secretary for Priority Social Affairs at the Prime Minister's Office responsible i.a. for affairs related to the Jewish communities.
- I also warmly greet the experts of the Hungarian Delegation.

IHRA and the British Chairmanship

IHRA is a unique intergovernmental organization dealing solely with questions of the Holocaust and directly related issues, such as antisemitism. Its mission is therefore indispensable for every country which takes non-discrimination, equality of rights, tolerance and respect of others seriously and in a historical context. **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. Just to mention some examples: a Multi-Year Work Plan was conceived during the Dutch Chairmanship. One of the most successful outcomes of the Multi-Year Work Plan is the first publication in the IHRA series, “Killing Sites. Remembrance and Research,” which was presented today by Sir Andrew Burns. A new name, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance was adopted during the Belgian Chairmanship, while a working definition of Holocaust denial and distortion was agreed upon during the Canadian Chairmanship. The UK Chairmanship defined ambitious goals in a White Paper, which we believe is a strong basis for our program. With regard to education, IHRA set professional and widely acknowledged standards which have a very beneficial impact on the elaboration of school curricula in the member states and beyond. IHRA similarly provided us with its best practices in the field of commemoration and memorialization including Holocaust Memorial Day.

It is a matter of great satisfaction for Hungary that **we are taking over the IHRA Chairmanship from the United Kingdom**, with whom, namely with Chairman Sir Andrew Burns, we could establish an excellent working relationship. **It was under the British Chairmanship that IHRA accomplished important achievements, namely:** the reaffirmation of the Stockholm Declaration; opening to the Western Balkans and as a result granting observer status to Albania, 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.

Besides these concrete achievements, **the most important contribution of the British Chairmanship**, however, was the increase in **IHRA’s influence and moral stature** on matters of Holocaust education, remembrance and research throughout the world. **Sir Andrew, please allow me to congratulate you warmly on these great achievements.**

Ladies and Gentlemen, please, allow me now to outline the **main milestones of Hungary’s membership and its efforts to comply with IHRA’s principles and guidelines**, then to give an **overview of the priorities of our Chairmanship and of our planned programme.**

Hungary and the Holocaust, Hungary and IHRA

It took a long time for Hungary until it was permitted to speak about the Holocaust frankly, since under the communist regime complex questions of history did not exist, there were only simplistic answers and taboos. Today Jewish life flourishes in Budapest, you can see religious Jews in their traditional attire walking in the streets, which was unimaginable 30-60 years ago. This was last imaginable and possible at the end of the thirties, until which Jews were considered to be an integral part of Hungarian society, though antisemitism gradually became accepted after the end of WWI. Hardly anyone however knew where this tide of antisemitism of that time could lead to. In 1944 the largest and the last almost intact Jewish community of Europe was deported to German death camps with record pace. One may ask: Why did Hungary betray its own loyal and patriotic citizens? There are several answers and explanations, more and less scientific ones. There is, however, only one sole lesson out of this question, the moral one. As **Prime Minister Viktor Orbán** put it some weeks ago 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 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.*'' Or as Mr. János Áder, President of Hungary said at the March of the Living memorial event in Auschwitz last year: *''It is a constant source of pain to realize that the Hungarian state did not oppose the Nazi German plan of the Final Solution, but in fact became an accomplice to it. It is no excuse or explanation that this also happened in many other countries across Europe.*''

Hence, the historical and moral basis for any Hungarian role in IHRA is immense and binding. For that reason and in order to eliminate the chance that it may happen again anywhere, it is a **firm policy of the Hungarian government to keep awareness and knowledge of the Holocaust and that of the Hungarian responsibility in it alive.**

Hungary was among those countries which adopted the **Stockholm Declaration** in 2000 and two years later it became a full Member Country of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. The subsequent years we witnessed milestone commemorative events, which included the launching of a **National Holocaust Memorial Day** in 2000, the inauguration of the **Holocaust Memorial Centre** in Budapest and the opening of the **new permanent Hungarian exhibition at the Auschwitz Memorial**, both in 2004. In the pursuit of the objectives of IHRA, the Hungarian Government has made and keeps making serious efforts; it declared the year 2012 as the **Wallenberg Year** and dedicated the year 2014 to the remembrance of the **70th**

anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust. Over the years of our IHRA membership Hungary **made considerable progress in antisemitism related legislation and law-enforcement, mandatory Holocaust teaching in school curricula and memorial activity.** The Hungarian government took and is taking note of rising antisemitism and xenophobia across Europe, Hungary included, and introduced a “zero tolerance policy” towards antisemitism and anti-Roma incidents and attitudes.

Priorities of the Hungarian Chairmanship

It is a great honour for Hungary to assume the Chairmanship for the second time. This obliges us to take ownership of IHRA’s principles and objectives in a **responsible manner.** After the reaffirmation of the Stockholm Declaration earlier this year we find it evident that in the 15th anniversary year of the Declaration, the Chairmanship bears the main responsibility in presenting IHRA as a visible and powerful organization with a long-term mission of tolerance, peace and stability in the world.

The Hungarian Chairmanship will endeavour to put **combatting antisemitism, Holocaust education and the Roma genocide** at the centre of its Chairmanship program.

The **rise of extremism and xenophobia** is a complex challenge that requires a comprehensive approach coupled with policies of long-term impact in education and social cohesion, together with other forms of awareness-raising activities. Therefore, during our Chairmanship we intend to pay special attention to the promotion of the use of **IHRA teaching guidelines.** We started consultations with the Hungarian authorities responsible for education in this regard.

Antisemitic political language, especially on the Internet, is more and more virulent, and it is highly difficult to strike the right balance between efficiently countering it and respecting the principle of freedom of speech. During our Chairmanship we will address this topic by organising a conference in cooperation with its initiator, the Committee on Antisemitism, under the title: **Holocaust related imagery and language in public discourse.**

We are also committed to commemorating the **Roma Genocide.** Therefore we plan to organise **a conference on the Roma genocide in autumn with special emphasis on the current situation of Roma communities.**

Our Chairmanship wishes to pay special attention to mark and preserve **historical sites** across Hungary where Holocaust-related events occurred. One of the main projects of the Hungarian Government is the **cemetery project** in which all

Jewish cemeteries in Hungary will be marked and renovated with the involvement of students. This will give younger generations an opportunity to raise their knowledge and awareness about the Holocaust in their own localities, and thus, indirectly, about the importance of combatting antisemitism.

One of our priorities will be the strengthening of **IHRA's visibility** utilising communication tools like the newsletter and social media. Our objective is to bring the organisation closer to the citizens by **organising workshops** (inviting journalists from the Post Soviet countries) and **highlighting the role of the Grant Strategy**.

We are aware of the important impact of the Hungarian IHRA membership in general, and the IHRA Chairmanship, upon Hungarian society, including the Jewish communities. Therefore, we are fully committed to a permanent cooperation with the **Hungarian Jewish organisations** and NGOs whose support we have already enjoyed during our preparation for the Chairmanship, and keep counting on in the future.

The Hungarian Chairmanship will pay particular attention to the continuity of pursuing IHRA's strategic goals laid down during the previous chairmanships. We are going to engage in **a strong cooperation with the Troika, namely with the UK and Romania** – a first meeting in that circle took place today.

During our Chairmanship we wish to contribute to the efforts of outreach to as many states as possible, but with special focus on the **Ukraine, the Vatican, and some of the countries in the Western Balkans and North Africa**. We also need to engage more with those countries where NGOs and Jewish communities show interest in cooperation with IHRA. We are committed to maintaining strong ties with the Permanent International Partners of IHRA by developing joint projects outside IHRA countries.

Programme of the Hungarian Chairmanship

As for the programmes of the Chairmanship, I note:

- **16 April: Memorial Day for Hungarian Victims of the Holocaust**, Participation at the related commemorations as Chairman of IHRA.
- **12-14 May: Global Forum on Combatting Antisemitism in Jerusalem** where I as IHRA chair will deliver a keynote speech and hold consultations with experts and partners from all over the world.
- **8-11 June: First Plenary Session of the Hungarian Chairmanship** to be held in Budapest in the elegant building of the newly renovated Vigadó, accompanied by various cultural events.

- **September-October:** The Hungarian Chairmanship organises together with the competent IHRA Committee a conference on the Roma Genocide.
- **2-5 November:** Second Plenary Session of the Hungarian Chairmanship to be held in Debrecen; the Hungarian Chairmanship intends to organise a conference together with the IHRA Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial on the issue of the use of Holocaust related imagery and language in public discourse.
- **Around 27 January 2016** (International Holocaust Remembrance Day): an academic conference will be held in Budapest on the topic:“The Phenomena of Rising Antisemitism in Western and Central-Eastern Europe”.

Conclusion

This year began with shocking acts in Paris and lately in Denmark by fanatics, who with stunningly bold violence demonstrated their intolerance of the views of others. This series of violent acts showed us all how dangerously religious extremism and intolerance may be present and show up even in our Western societies. Sadly enough all this phenomena of harsh violence and extremism are coupled with old and new forms of antisemitism. In this situation, antisemitic violence and terrorism became identical, which put the fight against antisemitism in a new dimension with more complex challenges. Education is the main, almost the only tool to effectively counter them. **This is why the role of IHRA is even bigger than we may think: through Holocaust-education and remembrance a tolerant society should and could be built up. That is the stake of our common work, to which I, as Chair ask for your support, trust and cooperation.**