Speech by the incoming Chair of the IHRA, Ambassador Georges Santer at the Forum – The Fight Against Antisemitism organized at the European Parliament in Brussels on February 7th, 2019

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

No international body present at this event owes more to Ambassador Mihnea Constantinescu than the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. It was under his guidance the landmark decision was taken to adopt the Working Definition of Antisemitism. Mihnea was a talented diplomat and a much respected colleague and friend. He knew what he wanted and he knew how to achieve his aims due to his many diplomatic skills. Already at my first IHRA meeting in Bucharest, I was tremendously impressed by his way of handling the plenary and he will remain an inspiring personality for me as incoming Chair.

On 26th of May 2016, the then 31 Member Countries of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) adopted in Bucharest a non-legally binding Working Definition of Antisemitism to guide the organization in its work.

The IHRA was the first intergovernmental body to adopt such a Working Definition of Antisemitism, the result of in-depth exchanges and discussions between international experts and political representatives.

Today we see a rise of antisemitism among other phobia and thus our democracies are asked to pay closer attention to and take specific steps in order to combat the problem of antisemitism. Existential questions have been raised about the viability of continued Jewish life in Europe – a community that has existed in Europe for ages. If this was to change, so too would the future of Europe as a democratic and pluralistic society. In the words of Frans Timmermans, First Vice President of the European Commission, "If there's no future for Jews in Europe, there's no future for Europe." Indeed, our values would have been lost or seriously eroded and we would have been deprived of basic fundaments of the post-war newly created Europe.

In order to combat antisemitism effectively, it is important to have clarity about what antisemitism is and how it may manifest itself.

The IHRA definition captures antisemitism in its developmental stages and mutations, reflects current realities and is of practical use. It seeks to educate and inspires dialogue on forms of antisemitism: from antisemitism that emerges from hateful intent to unconscious forms of discrimination, as well as subsequent antisemitic actions that deny rights and a feeling of safety and security to Jews or people identifying as Jews.

The examples reflect forms of antisemitism as they exist today. This list is not meant to be exhaustive – as noted in the text preceding the examples - since antisemitism is an ever-changing form of hatred that adapts to social, cultural, and political contexts over time, even if some parameters are simply atavistic.

The legally non-binding Working Definition is being used as a practical tool and serves as a basis for different kind of projects, including training in education, justice, and police, or monitoring initiatives.

To date, the Working Definition has been adopted and endorsed by an impressive number of Governments and other State organs and institutions. We happily note that over the last two months, there is a new dynamic among States to adopt the Working Definition. It might well be that this new dynamic is owed to the adoption on December 6th by the Home and Justice Affairs Council of an EU Declaration on Antisemitism.

I would like to pay tribute to all those who have made possible the adoption of that excellent declaration and mention specifically the Austrian presidency of the Union. The fact that the December European Council had a reference in its conclusions must be highly welcomed. In this context, I need also to mention the role of the European Parliament, who already in 2017 had adopted a resolution on the same subject. Among other things, the EU Declaration "calls on the member States that have not done so yet to endorse the non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism employed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) as a useful guidance tool in education and training, including for law enforcement authorities in their efforts to identify and investigate antisemitic attacks more efficiently and effectively."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

the challenges we are facing are enormous. We need to get our acts together, because the risks at stake are high and thus we have to federate our efforts. We are ready to strengthen our ties with our permanent international partners and other important players.

Let me revert once more to Ambassador Mihnea Constantinescu. We highly appreciated that the second plenary under the Romanian IHRA Chairmanship was organized in Iasi, where plaques were unveiled and monuments restored to commemorate the terrible pogrom that took place there in June 1941. We commend vividly the Romanian authorities for having undertaken this courageous step to assume their part of responsibility. An example to follow. Almost all of the European States have to accept a certain part of responsibility in the darkest chapter of the European continent.

Many speakers that preceded me mentioned the growing deterioration of the overall situation for Jews in Europe, and this deterioration is gaining speed. In our work we refer to the Stockholm Declaration of 2000, which is not only the birth certificate of the IHRA, it is our code of conduct and it will remain so. But given the challenges ahead of us, we must see whether – at a moment where the last survivors will have left us soon – we can foster a cultural remembrance that stands vigorously up to those who deny or distort the Holocaust. We have to ask ourselves what kind of culture of remembrance we shall need tomorrow; what new efforts we have to make in our pedagogics; how we have to further stimulate research.

So in view that we shall commemorate in less than 12 months the 75th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp and the 20th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Stockholm Declaration, the IHRA Member States have decided to start crafting a forceful message to be adopted in early 2020. It should reaffirm strongly our traditional commitments, but also deal with new challenges under new forms of populism and nationalism, with the appalling new appearances of hate speech carried out through the new digital means of our age, with the abominable threats against Jews who are our fellow citizens. Our Jewish compatriots have over centuries contributed to the well-being of our countries and to the outstanding achievements of our worldwide highly admired culture.

So the Luxembourg IHRA Chairmanship will spare no effort to have all the Member States rally behind a collective effort to come forth with a new text that shall give us new strengths, new ideas in order to stand up against new and old forms of intolerance, discrimination and hate. This must be

done on the basis of the very core business of the IHRA, which is remembrance. The IHRA will continue to strive for a noble cause, because the fact that a Jewish compatriot is leaving this continent due to insecurity or felt insecurity is a shame not only for the country he will be leaving, but for the entire continent. Thank you very much.