EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Yad Vashem –

European Holocaust Remembrance Infrastructure

Yad Vashem

Jerusalem, 14.00, 12 March 2019

- It is a great pleasure to be with you today and highlight EU-Israel **cooperation on Holocaust research**. Many thanks to Yad Vashem and the EU Delegation to Israel for staging this event together.
- Yad Vashem is not only one of the most important places to keep the memory of the Shoah alive, but it has also been at front in developing concepts to educate future generations about it.

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- I visited Yad Vashem for the first time in 1995 with my parents when it was still the old Memorial site. Everyone came out crying. And the last thing one wanted to be is German.
- Throughout my childhood, Holocaust survivors were part of our circle of friends, and my parents taught us the responsibility that comes with being German in Europe.
- It was only when I moved to Prague after having finished school and met Shoah survivors who spent their lives sharing their experience with Czech pupils that I understood the need for passing the *universal* message of this crime against humanity, to prevent it from happening again.

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Antisemitism today

- Europe and Israel share a common history, through the presence of Jewish life in Europe for 2 millenia and the enormous contribution of the Jewish community to European culture, economy and politics. At the same time Jew-hatred has been intrinsic to European DNA. It culminated in the Holocaust 80 years ago and is still haunting Europe today.
- A good deal of my work in the fight against Antisemitism since my appointment in December 2015 has thus been to ensure that non-Jewish audiences understand the nexus between Antisemitism today and the Holocaust then.
- I am aware that it has not been easy for Yad Vashem to extend their focus on Shoah research to education about the various forms of today's Antisemitism. But wisely you went down this road and it was an honour for me to participate in 2017 in the first Yad Vashem MOOC (Massive open online course) on antisemitism.
- Beyond the Antisemitism that brought about the Holocaust, the racism and the conspiracy theories, it is important to explain the forms of antisemitism that have developed after the

Holocaust. The *new* Antisemitism. And I do not mean the so-called *imported* antisemitism, but secondary Antisemitism that does not exist *despite*, but *because* of Auschwitz, because some "cannot forgive the Jews, what they did to Europe".

- This form of antisemitism seems to me particularly painful for the Jewish communities (not only in Europe). For who has not lost family members in the Shoah?
- From our recent survey conducted by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency among 16.300 European Jews, we know when it comes to Jewish identity in Europe 94% respondents mention Holocaust remembrance as factor number one.
- At the same time, the CNN study in December revealed that a third of Europeans know little or nothing about the Holocaust. 1 in 20 has never heard of the Holocaust.
- And our own Eurobarometer among 27.000 Europeans of January 2019 has shown that 4 in 10 Europeans do not consider Holocaust denial a problem.

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- The other important factor of Jewish identity in Europe according to our FRA survey is 'support for Israel'. Support for the existence of Erez Israel, independently of its government. As FVP Timmermans put it at the Grand Synagogue in Brussels: *"The existence of the state of Israel is the ultimate triumph over the attempt to eliminate the Jewish nation. There will now always be a homeland where every Jew is safe."*
- It is important to explain this fact.
- Because the two post-Shoah forms of Antisemitism: right-wing **Holocaust trivialisation by false comparisons** as well as the left-wing anti-Zionist idea **that the existence of the state of Israel in itself is a racist endeavour**, go right to the heart of Jewish identity in Europe today.
- And when you feel that your identity is endangered in a certain environment, you start thinking about leaving before you suffocate. Since 2014 for the first time since WWII the number of Jewish citizens in Europe is declining.
- There is much talk in Europe about, "imported" Antisemitism. But these forms of antisemitism have existed in Europe, with or without Muslim immigration. Yet we are aware that Muslim population in Europe harbour 2-3 times higher antisemitic prejudices, including the idea that the Jews and Israel exploit the Holocaust for their own advantage.

- It must be understood, that the Holocaust is the history of *all* Europeans, independent of where their parents or grandparents came from.
- Holocaust remembrance, research and education is thus not only backward looking, but very much a forward-looking topic. Because accepting Jewish live is a sign for a healthy society and a benchmark for successful integration.

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- This understanding, together with the recent "explosion" of antisemitic acts in several European countries, has resulted in a wake-up call among EU countries which resulted in a Council declaration on Antisemitism agreed unanimously by all EU Member States in December 2018. Essentially, the declaration is to say: Europe is on the side of the Jews.
- In it, member states agree among other to adopt and implement holistic strategies on all forms of Antisemitism, they call upon themselves to endorse the IHRA definition, they commit to increase their efforts to ensure the security of Jewish communities and provide the financing, to promote Holocaust education as well as on the role of Jewish communities in Europe today, include these issues into integration courses, address hate speech online.
- The European Commission is currently setting up a working group with the EU member States to ensure that these measures will be put into practice and result in national strategies by 2020.

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Holocaust education

- Allow me to focus in this context on Holocaust education. The central question is *how* we will remember in the future. As less and less survivors are with us, Holocaust remembrance, research and education will have to transform and the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure is one of our pillars to live up to these new challenges.
- Holocaust remembrance and education is not a responsibilities of the Jews, let alone the survivors, but without you it's not possible either.
- Only recently a daughter of two Holocaust survivors told me, "I married early, but I did not want to have children, so no-one could take them away from me". I thought just how many lives the Nazis and their collaborators destroyed beyond the ones they killed directly. It is

important to understand this and to invite the 2nd and 3rd generation to share their experience.

- Only four out of 10 Europeans think the Holocaust is sufficiently taught. There is definitely room for improvement.
- For several years Yad Vashem has participated in our annual EU-Israel Seminar on Racism, Xenophobia and Antisemitism. And it is good to see that most EU Member States have by now concluded bilateral agreements with Yad Vashem regarding collaboration on teach the teacher programmes and educate for law enforcement agencies.
- I had the privilege in 2016 to listen in on one of such seminars held for Austrian judges by the education department. It was very hands-on and must have had a lasting effect on the participants.

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- Finally, there is another development with regards to the Shoah: the Europeanisation of the Holocaust. Until recently the research was national, remembrance was national, the language national. However, newly opened archives in former Communist countries and a wider European scope, finally allow us to show what researchers have said "*By design, intent and implementation, the Holocaust was a European event*".
- In Nov 2018, to underline this process, the EU became Permanent International Partner of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.
- And since 2010 EHRI has been building a successful European research infrastructure and a human network for Holocaust research.
- As EHRI is now on the verge of becoming a permanent structure we are counting more than ever on the support of Member States. Already Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia and the UK have pledged their support. We hope more countries will follow.
- Europeanisation is fundamentally important to understanding the topics of i) collaboration in Nazi-occupied Europe, ii) transnational biographies of Jews, and iii) European crime scenes (i.e. only recently a Holocaust mass grave was discovered in Belarus).
- Europeanisation will contribute to the sharpening of a common European narrative of the Holocaust, next to the national ones. Without neglecting the fate of the many other victims

in the countries occupied by Nazi Germany, this narrative must arrive in European classrooms rather sooner than later.

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- Independent, transnational Holocaust research, borderless and virtual access to archives, carrying the message about the undistorted truth of the Holocaust into the public space is the main weapon against historical revisionism.
- This is why – with 8 million Euro – the European Holocaust Remembrance Infrastructure constitutes the largest Humanities project in the Horizon 2020 Research framework and with over one million for the digitalisation of their archives, Yad Vashem is one of its most important beneficiaries.
- Digitalized archives will help researchers to dig out more details on local, national and European history of the Holocaust, including when it comes to sensitive topics of collaboration and local complacency.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- In our daily work we aim at ensuring a future for Jews in Europe and this means looking frankly at our past.

- The European Holocaust Research Infrastructure will continue to support this endeavour.

Thank you!