Joint Statement by President von der Leyen, President Michel, President Sassoli ahead of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau

Jerusalem, 23 January 2020

"To forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time." — Elie Wiesel, Night

Seventy-five years ago, Allied Forces liberated the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. They ended the most abhorrent crime in European history, the planned annihilation of the Jews in Europe. Six million Jewish children, women and men were murdered as well as millions of innocent people among them hundreds of thousands of Roma, persecuted due to their ethnicity. The price was unspeakably high, but there could hardly be a more symbolic and greater triumph over the Nazis than to commemorate this victory in Israel.

Revisionism and lack of education are threatening the common understanding of the uniqueness of the Shoah that is necessary to translate "Never Again" into concrete action now. By joining today's meeting of Heads of State and Government in Jerusalem, we add our voices to those who are determined to not let extremists and populists go unchallenged when they are trying to cross boundaries and question – once again – human dignity and equality of all human beings.

The Holocaust was a European tragedy, it was a turning point in our history and its legacy is woven into the DNA of the European Union. Remembering the Shoah is not an end in itself. It is one cornerstone of European values. A Europe that places humanity at its centre, protected by the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights.

We are at a crossroads. As the numbers of survivors is dwindling, we will have to find new ways to remember, embracing the testimonies of the descendants of survivors. They remind us to be vigilant about the rising tide of antisemitism that is threatening the values we hold dear — pluralism, diversity, and the freedoms of religion and expression. Values that cherish minorities: all minorities, and always. Jewish communities have contributed to shaping the European identity and will always be part of it.All parts of our society, new and old, must embrace these lessons from the Shoah.

We have a duty to stand shoulder to shoulder with Jewish communities as they feel again threatened across Europe - most recently in Halle, Germany. All EU Member States stand united in the determination that any form of racism, antisemitism and hatred have no place in Europe and we will do whatever it takes to counter them. State authorities, as well as actors from across all sectors of civil society should unite to reaffirm Europe's unfaltering vigilance whenever and wherever democratic values are threatened.

We cannot change history, but the lessons of history can change us.

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STATEMENT/20/90

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