

*Speech of Prime Minister Călin Popescu Țăriceanu at Yad Vashem
Memorial*

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,*

The Yad Vashem Memorial is a place for remembrance of both the victims and of the survivors of the darkest period in the history of Europe. It is a place of reflection for everyone, generation after generation, Jews or not, people who experienced the horrors of the Holocaust, youngsters who learn about it just now, and for the generations to follow. It is also a lesson we must learn from the past, so that nothing even slightly similar will ever have a chance to happen again.

The memory must live on not only here, at Yad Vashem, but also in the minds and hearts of all of us. The recollection of and the teaching about the terrible tragedy of the Holocaust is a never ending task. Moreover, it is getting even more imperative as direct testimony is fading away.

The development and enlargement of the Yad Vashem Memorial is part of the proper response to this collective task. The rest of the work is to be done by each of us, as we must make sure that the importance of what has happened will never be diminished or forgotten.

Romania thoroughly assumed its responsibility in this joint endeavor, for which it took benefit from the valuable assistance of important senior managers of Yad Vashem, as well as from the small, yet bighearted Museum's researchers of Romanian origin.

In the history book of mankind, there is also, unfortunately, a somber page concerning the tragic fate of the Romanian Jews who lost their lives or their beloved ones during World War II, in Bassarabia, Bucovina, in the Transdnestr region, in Bucharest and in Jassy, in Dorohoi and Focsani. This appalling chapter in our recent history cannot be eluded or forgotten. The fate of the Jews killed or deported, forced to leave the country or deprived of their liberties, rights and belongings is a moral lesson that must be learned in the ongoing process of memory recovery and responsibility assumption.

Romania, now a democratic country, a member of the Euro-Atlantic community and a future member of the European Union, is highly aware of its moral duty to the memory of all those who suffered as a result of the anti-Semitic and racist policies during a troubled moment of its history. That is why an International Commission for Holocaust in Romania was set up. Its work left a profound mark upon the conscience of the Romanians and I reconfirm our determination to observe the Commission's recommendations. On behalf of my country I thank its staff, the Israeli researchers and, foremost, the Nobel Peace Laureate Prof. Elie Wiesel, who proficiently chaired the Commission.

Romania has also fixed an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day, which is October 9. On this Day, we bring homage both to the thousands of victims of discrimination and indifference, and to those many Romanians who saved their Jewish brethren from death, thus risking their freedom or lives. Fifty-one of them have been acknowledged so far as "Righteous among the Nations". There is no time to mention them all. I shall refer to only one story that occurred in those traumatic times. It is about a young girl, Hanna Kende, who, like many others, was caught up in the horror of the Holocaust. Hanna was a Jew, who grew up in a Romanian city. Everything changed except her friend, Magdalena Stroe. Magdalena was a young girl who endangered her own life to save Hanna's. She had the courage to give her Jewish friend her own identity documents so that Hanna could leave the country.

The tragic significance of the Holocaust must be known and understood by all citizens, particularly by youth, to prevent any possible anti-Semitic or discriminatory tendency. The Romanian Government is working hard to this end. We outlawed fascist, racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic organizations and symbols. The study of Holocaust in schools – for which a closer cooperation with Yad Vashem is instrumental – proved to be extremely beneficial. It has already entailed a change in the public perception of this terrible episode of our history. We intend to set up a Museum of the Holocaust and to start a strong information media campaign. There are many other projects that we have in mind such as a long-term program for training the trainers, a research visit to Yad Vashem for young journalists.

The recovery of truth about the fate of a big community of fellow citizens is particularly important in a country like Romania. That is because Romanians

and Jews share common values. Many Jewish personalities enriched the Romanian cultural, artistic and scientific heritage. We are strongly determined to strengthen the partnership with the Israeli authorities in identifying and reinserting the Jewish heritage in the global circuit of our historic and cultural values.

Tolerance, freedom and respect for human dignity are the values that we must cultivate to prevent future generations from turning into perpetrators, victims or passive out lookers to genocide or to a tragedy like the Holocaust. We are genuinely committed to this end.

Today, when threatening anti-Semitic, racist and xenophobe voices are still being heard in various places of the world, we are absolutely resolute: anti-Semitic behavior is not to be tolerated. We must build up societies which ensure equal rights to all people irrespective of their origin, their language, their skin color or their God. Hate will never prevail again.

Thank you.