



General Assembly
Leipzig, 27 August 2026

Acceptance Speech by the New President, Sacha Zala

«Très ému par l'élection au poste de Président du Comité international des sciences historiques, et très honoré par la charge qui m'incombe [...], je me permets tout d'abord de remercier [...] l'assemblée générale pour cette preuve de confiance qui elle a bien voulu me témoigner.»¹

Dear colleagues, dear friends

With these words, Aleksander Gieysztor accepted his election to the presidency of CISH in Bucharest on 17 August 1980. His address is reproduced as document 32 in our new documentary edition on the history of CISH (dodis.ch/75263).

Today, I would like to make his words my own.

First and foremost, allow me to thank you sincerely for the confidence you have placed in me. In academia, we are used to asking difficult questions. Today, however, I find myself confronted with perhaps the most difficult question of all:

«Why did I run for this job?»

But I will do my very best not to ask myself that question too often. I am sure that my partner Andrea, who has accompanied me to the CISH Congress since Oslo in the year 2000, will be happy to ask it for me—probably once a week.

To be elected President of CISH is a profound honour, and I accept this responsibility with no illusions about its demands. My experience as CISH Treasurer, combined with twelve years as President of a major National Committee and service as President of an Affiliated International Organisation, has occasionally called for a certain degree of intellectual acrobatics. Yet these different roles have allowed me to understand from within the interests, expectations, and distinct perspectives at each of these three different dimensions. One of my central responsibilities as President will be to bring them together—to respect their differences, identify common ground, and align their

¹ Sacha Zala and Lila Zeller (ed.): Building an Oecumene of Historians. Documents on the History of the Comité International des Sciences Historiques 1926–2026, Bern 2026 (Quaderni di Dodis – fonti, vol. 29), doc. 32, dodis.ch/75263.



interests in the service of CISH as a whole.

Our association has a remarkable long history, a strong international network, and an important mission.

At the same time, we live in a world that is changing rapidly. International cooperation is becoming more complex, expectations are increasing, and decisions often need to be taken more quickly than in the past. In many countries, history is under attack, academic freedom is being threatened, research funding is being cut, archives are restricting access to sources, and history courses in schools are being reduced or even scrapped altogether.

With the adoption of the new Constitution, I am confident that we have laid the institutional foundations needed to meet these challenges.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the colleagues—and friends—who carried this reform forward through two years of intensive, at times demanding, but always constructive discussions about the future of CISH.

I thank our outgoing President, **Catherine Horel**, and our Secretary-General, **Edoardo Tortarolo**, for giving me the institutional space to develop this initiative and for enabling the reform process to advance in an open and constructive spirit.

Our two Vice-Presidents deserve particular recognition. **Eliana Dutra** has worked tirelessly to expand and strengthen CISH's networks across Latin America, bringing new institutions, scholarly communities, and perspectives more closely into our common work. **Krzysztof Makowski** faced the extraordinary task of guiding the XXIII International Congress of Historical Sciences in Poznań through the uncertainty, postponements, and disruption caused by the pandemic. Under exceptionally difficult circumstances, he and his colleagues ultimately delivered a highly successful congress of lasting significance.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to **Gunlög Fur**, **Hiroataka Watanabe**, **Joel Harrington**, and **Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro**. Each brought a distinctive perspective, intellectual generosity, and invaluable experience to our discussions, helping to transform an ambitious idea into a viable constitutional framework.

I am particularly pleased that **Matthias Middell** and **Katalin Szende** will continue to serve on the new Board. I very much look forward to continuing our work together and benefiting from their considerable knowledge and experience.

I also warmly welcome the new members of the Board. Together, we will work to make CISH more open, more inclusive, and better equipped to meet the challenges of its second century. I am particularly proud that, for the first time in CISH's history, women constitute a majority of the Board.

Finally, I wish to thank our Deputy Secretary-General, **Flavio Eichmann**, for the efficient and indispensable work he has carried out through our newly established Office in Bern



throughout this process.

This reform is the product of collective reflection, mutual trust, and a shared determination to prepare CISH for its second century. I am immensely proud—and profoundly grateful—that, together, we have made it possible.

We should now focus on **four** priorities:

first, the professionalisation of CISH to make it more efficient and agile;

second, strengthening cooperation among our members, in particular by reinforcing ties with our National Organisations and deepening collaboration with our Affiliated International Organisations;

third, further developing the organisation of international congresses, making them more dynamic, financially sustainable, and attractive to the worldwide historical community;

and **fourth**, to become more visible and vocal wherever history and academic freedom are under attack, while remaining true to our diplomatic tradition of building an «Oecumene of Historians».

Now that you have entrusted the new Board and me with this responsibility, there will be little time for celebration—and even less for a honeymoon. The task before us is considerable, and our work must begin at once.

I am under no illusion that any President could accomplish it alone. This presidency can succeed only through close cooperation among the Board, the Office, and the member organisations that form the foundation of CISH.

I accept this charge with humility, determination, and enthusiasm. I am fully conscious of the demands it will place upon us in the years ahead. Yet I am equally confident that, together, we possess the knowledge, experience, and energy required to meet them—and to ensure that the CISH we cherish is ready to enter its second century.

Next spring, less than a year from now, we will meet online for our next General Assembly—the first to convene under our new Constitution. When we meet, the new Board and I intend to report not merely on plans, but on tangible results worthy of your trust.

Thank you once again for the confidence you placed in the constructive process that led to the adoption of our new Constitution, and for the trust you have now placed in the new Board. We shall do everything in our power to prove worthy of it.

Merci! Herzlichen Dank!