

**Ceremony to mark the
International Remembrance Day of the Roma Holocaust (*Pharrajimos*)**

Strasbourg, 2 August 2016, 12:00 hrs

Statement by **Ambassador Katrin KIVI**, Permanent Representative of Estonia to the Council of Europe, on behalf of the Estonian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

Dear Secretary General, President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg, Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- On 2 August 1944, 3000 Roma men, women and children were exterminated at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. They were not executed because they were guilty of some criminal offence or because they were a threat to the security of the state. They were executed simply because they were Roma. They were executed on the grounds of so-called "race".
- Although the Nazis' conception of "Gypsies" was built upon a racist ideology, on the level of concrete decisions and legal acts the racial thoughts were often concealed behind labels such as "asocial," "work-shy" or "socially unadjusted people."
- The crimes committed against the Roma have not been sufficiently documented. We only have documents established by the perpetrators but we do not have rich archive materials that would reveal the full scale of the atrocities.
- Racist ideologies have not vanished from our world; there are still groups in society who are ready to preach such ideas and act upon them. Those who suffered during the Nazi era, including Roma and Sinti, cannot forget that racist ideologies were the root cause of their persecution at that time, and that is also why they feel particularly threatened today by extremist or neo-Nazi groups. These groups are not afraid to go out to the public and praise the Nazi ideology, revive its symbols and slogans, as well as organise rallies and marches to celebrate the Nazi past. And, very sadly, they continue to attract followers. We must put an end to intolerance, racism and xenophobia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Anti-Gypsyism has, unlike anti-Semitism, never really been questioned and therefore still remains part of the "cultural code" of large parts of the majority population.
- A basic feature of the anti-Gypsyism is the manner in which Roma are reduced to their supposed "Gypsy-ness". Roma are not seen as individuals or as personalities but as "Gypsies": this label

becomes a deciding characteristic in how they are perceived. Instead of perceiving them as compatriots with the same rights they become mere "Gypsies" with all related prejudices and stereotypes.

- This is very dangerous because also the racially-motivated mass murder of Roma during the Second World War was initiated by misanthropic media campaigns, systematic criminalisation, and a process of exclusion, disenfranchisement, and dehumanisation that had already started in the 1930s.
- Already the „Strasbourg Declaration on Roma“, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 October 2010, made the fight against Roma-related stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination and hate speech one of the Organisation’s priorities. The Declaration also promoted to foster knowledge and understanding of Roma culture, history and languages.
- Combating anti-Gypsyism, fighting for the social inclusion of Roma, and raising awareness of the Roma Holocaust (*Pharrajmos*) are amongst the top priorities in the Council of Europe Thematic Action Plan for the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019), which was approved by the Committee of Ministers in March this year. Innovative projects and tools are promoted through 21 concrete actions points under the 3 priorities tackling anti-Gypsyism; protecting the most vulnerable, such as women, children, and youth; and stepping up action at local level. The fight against anti-Gypsyism includes fostering knowledge of the common history of Roma and non-Roma. The contribution of Roma to Europe’s historical and cultural heritage and diversity should be acknowledged. The Council of Europe support for the European Parliament Resolution of 15 April 2015 to declare 2 August “European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day” will be explored.

Distinguished audience,

- I take this opportunity to remember you that a photo exhibition entitled “We, the Roma” was organised from 25 May to 24 June 2016 to mark the beginning of the Estonian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The exhibition represented an insight into the day-to-day life of the Roma living in Estonia side by side with Estonians and other ethnic groups. In this context, I would also like to stress that care and respect towards all members of the society, especially towards its more vulnerable members or groups, is a sign of a strong democracy.
- We, all Europeans, young and old, should recognise the Roma Holocaust and try to understand what it means for this community to still being persecuted after having lost hundreds of thousands of Roma, murdered under the Nazis and other regimes and their allies.
- It is crucial to end the silence that has lasted for nearly seven decades. Recognition of the Roma Holocaust and giving the history of the Roma its rightful place in the history of Europe are essential

for building confidence and trust between Roma and non-Roma, and essential in our struggle to end hate and persecution and to achieve a life in dignity for all Roma, in full equality with other citizens.

- Ladies and gentlemen, this commemoration would lose its meaning if it were limited to remembering the past only. It is also a strong reminder of our duty to work for a better future. A future where all Roma across Europe enjoy their human rights in safety and freedom.

Thank you for your attention!