

COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONY IN MEMORY OF THE ROMA VICTIMS OF THE
PHARRAJIMOS, THE HOLOCAUST OF THE ROMA

Wednesday, 2 August 2017 at 12:00
Forecourt of the Palais de l'Europe

**Dear Ambassadors, Excellences,
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,**

Today is a day to remember, to reflect but to look forward.

During the night of 2-3 August 1944, the nightmare for over three thousands Roma inmates in the "Zigeunerlager B III" at Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp came to a tragic end. We remember the disappearance of children, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and grandparents ...human beings who were not considered good enough to live. The **Pharrajimos**, the Holocaust of the Roma is by far the biggest tragedy in the history of the Roma.

The world has:

- **A duty to remember** that the Holocaust was a systematic attempt to eliminate the Jewish, the Roma and Sinti and so many others;
- **Not to allow** any excuse of **anti-Gypsyism anti-Semitism, Homophobia, Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination and prejudice** in our countries;
- **Not to allow** any form of **prejudice** to disrupt the multi-faith democracy we are so proud to call our biggest value.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In view of the enormity of this crime, we may reasonably ask why, after 73 years, no official recognition of the Roma Holocaust has been forthcoming from the European states and why these atrocities have yet to find the place they deserve in the history books. And yet, we cannot understand the anti-Gypsyism that still prevails in Europe today without understanding that genocidal history.

For many decades, the Roma survivors of Nazi persecution remained silent, rarely telling their stories or sharing their bitter experiences. Their voice was not heard. Consequently, since remembrance

depends on people's memories, survivors' testimonies, research, historical records and official recognition, the Roma suffering went largely unnoticed.

After 1945, many countries did not acknowledge and **condemn the racial persecution of Roma; furthermore, for decades they pursued discriminatory practices against Roma and Sinti, including the compensation process.**

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 the 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, and organise rallies and marches to celebrate the Nazi past. And, sadly, they continue to attract followers.

The ERTF calls upon Council of Europe member States to immediately enact laws recognising anti-Gypsyism as a specific form of racism, following the ECRI General Policy Recommendation No 13, and in line with the Council of Europe and EU anti-discrimination legal framework and campaigns (EU Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia). This will enable the prevention and condemnation of anti-Roma crimes, with a view to a stricter application of the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC). It will enable the EU to go further in addressing hate speech by working with IT companies, civil society and the media, ensuring implementation of hate crime laws and EU rules on victims' right, improving the recording and data collection of hate crime incidents, promoting diversity and enforcing and strengthening non-discrimination rules.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Teaching about the Holocaust is the key - to fighting modern day racism and intolerance. It means a commitment to valuing human beings, their dignity and their rights. Remembering is not enough; laws which protect the dignity and rights of human beings have to be followed. That was the logic of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that is the logic of ensuring the principles of equality and non-discrimination within basic laws or constitutions. In the same way, law enforcement tools must be applied effectively to prevent and to punish violent manifestations of racist and extremist ideologies. The Council of Europe, as the Human Rights Organisation plays a key role in developing strategies by actively defending these values.

At the same time, we have to fight anti-Gypsyism through education and through the way we raise our children.

As a matter of course, teaching about the Roma Holocaust should be an explicit and integral part of teaching about the Holocaust in general. The official school curriculum should include units on Roma history and Holocaust and governments should invest in producing documentary films and developing information fact sheets on Roma history and culture.

WE should USE education as a tool against ignorance and obscurantism. As European citizens, we are all responsible, both politicians and civil society, to make Europe an example, where its citizens contribute to a land where peace and respect for human dignity reside.

As a priority, parents should stop passing on anti-Gypsyism messages to their children, and they should no longer neglect the danger of hate speech, aggressive racism and xenophobia. The European Roma and Travellers Forum, jointly with other international organizations, have repeatedly called for the strengthening of initiatives to promote cultural diversity in an effort to fight discrimination. More fundamentally, I appeal to you today as a fellow human being, let's speak openly and truthfully on this issue and accept a common responsibility and finally give it its due respect and recognition for what it really was - a human tragedy beyond the limits of the mind-set.

Thank you for your attention!