

Commemoration ceremony
International Remembrance Day of the Roma Holocaust (*Pharrajimos*)
Strasbourg, 2 August 2017, 12:00 hrs

Thorsten Afflerbach
Head of the Support Team of the
Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (SRSG) for Roma
Issues

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are here today together with representatives of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) to pay homage to the hundreds of thousands of Roma who were killed all over Europe during the Second World War.

On 2 August 1944, the so-called “Gypsy camp” at Auschwitz-Birkenau was liquidated.

In one single night, some 3,000 Roma men, women and children were murdered in the gas chambers.

The Roma Holocaust remains the biggest tragedy in Roma history. And it is vital that all Europeans recognise it as such.

Because unless we acknowledge the past we are less likely to take the steps necessary to overcome current day prejudice and obstacles.

There is still much more to do before we can say that we have done everything possible to protect Roma rights.

But here at the Council of Europe, we are committed to doing that. Let me give you just some examples.

We work with respected scholars on the teaching of the Roma Holocaust, and we encourage the recognition of the Roma Holocaust by our member States.

The fight for the social inclusion of Roma is a key priority, as reflected by our Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers.

Our European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is combating anti-Gypsyism and hate speech, an issue also tackled by the youth campaign called “No Hate Speech Movement”.

Meanwhile, our “Dosta! Campaign” aims to raise awareness of examples of good practice in Roma inclusion.

We foster the teaching of the common history, shared by Roma and non-Roma, and of the positive contribution made by Roma and Travellers to Europe’s cultural heritage and diversity.

At the beginning of June, the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC) was launched in Berlin, a joint venture between the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and a European Alliance of Roma artists and scholars.

The Institute will promote arts and culture as a means to supporting human rights and thereby tackling anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against Roma in Europe.

It has been a personal priority for our Secretary General, Thorbjørn Jagland, and he is committed to its progress.

Crucially, at the European Court of Human Rights, Roma and Travellers’ rights are protected by judgments upholding the terms of the European Convention on Human Rights.

And the European Social Charter, too, plays a vital role, protecting the social rights of Roma and Travellers.

Of course, every one of us, as a European citizen, also has a duty to remember.

We have the duty to be vigilant and to stand up against discrimination.

And we have the duty to fight for human rights and democracy in order to help create a better Europe for Roma and Travellers: a better Europe for all of us.

Thank you.