

# **European Holocaust Memorial Day for Roma and Sinti**

## **Auschwitz, 2 August 2026**

Speech by Ms Petra Bayr

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

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Distinguished guests,

dear friends,

This is my third time here, in Auschwitz-Birkenau. But it is my first time here as President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. That gives this visit a special weight.

In June this year our General Rapporteur to combating Racism and Intolerance, Francesco Verducci, invited me to a seminar in Rome on the occasion of the international day of countering hate speech. There I met Liliana Segre. She is a senator for life in Italy. She is also a Holocaust survivor. As a young Jewish girl, she was held prisoner here, in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

She told me something I cannot forget. She said that here, in Auschwitz, she envied the Roma, Romni, Sinti and Sintize. Why? Because they were allowed to stay together as families. Parents with children. Grandparents with grandchildren. In this terrible place, that felt to her almost like a kindness, like a mercy.

Then, one night, it ended. On the 2nd of August 1944, the Roma and Sinti families here were murdered. All of them In one single night. After that, Liliana told me, she envied them no more.

I share this story because it says something important. Auschwitz did not separate one people's suffering from another's. And neither should we, when we remember. The genocide of the Roma and Sinti, the Porajmos, the Romanes term for engulfment, must be remembered clearly. With the same names. The same grief. As every other crime committed on this ground.

But remembering is not enough. It gives us a duty. A duty to act, today. And tomorrow.

And today, Roma and Sinti are still the largest minority in Europe. And in too many countries, they still face discrimination. In housing. In schools. In jobs. In access to justice. They are often blamed first. And heard last. Antigypsyism did not end in the twentieth century. It is still here. Sometimes loud. More often quiet, hidden inside our institutions.

This is why our General Rapporteur on Roma and Sinti issues, Georgios Stamatis, does such important and passionate work. This work keeps these questions at the center of our Assembly. Not at the edge of it. This is also why the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Michael O'Flaherty, makes Roma and Sinti rights a priority. An institution built on human dignity cannot look away from one of its largest communities.

We still have a long way to go. Before where someone comes from, or how they speak, or how they look, stops deciding their chances in life. This is not a distant dream. It is real work. And it belongs to all of us who hold public office.

But I do not want to end only on what is still wrong. I am glad, truly glad, that the Roma community today is active. Visible. Loud. Young Roma activists, artists, and leaders are claiming their place. They work to boost the self-esteem of Romani people and challenge negative stereotypes. They tell their own stories, in their own voices. They

are no longer only spoken about. They speak for themselves. This is not a threat to our democracies. This is exactly what strong democracies need.

Before I end, I want to return to Liliana Segre. She survived. She chose to spend her life telling her story, so the world would not forget. The Roma and Sinti murdered here did not have this choice. They cannot tell their own story. So today, in this place, on this day, we tell it for them.

Liliana taught me that memory only matters if it changes how we act tomorrow. So let this day be more than remembrance. Let it be a promise. A promise that we, as Europe's institutions, will not look away. Not from discrimination. Not from hatred. Not from the Roma and Sinti communities who are still waiting for the equality they were promised.

Let's take today's opportunity to listen, to learn and to act together. Thank you.