

**Commemoration Ceremony on the occasion of the
European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day (Pharrajimos)
Strasbourg, 2 August 2018**

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

I welcome you to this ceremony on behalf of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland.

We are gathered here today in remembrance of the Roma Holocaust.

At least 500,000 Roma were exterminated during the Second World War by the Nazi regime and its allies. More than 23,000 were killed in the so-called Gypsy-camp (*Zigeunerlager*) in the extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. On the 2nd of August 1944, 3,000 Roma men, women and children were murdered in a single night.

Through remembrance, we pay tribute to the victims of the mass annihilation of Roma, Jews, LGBTI persons, people with disabilities, and other groups during the Second World War. Our aim is to prevent this from ever happening again.

Ladies and Gentlemen

For a long time, Europe turned a blind eye to the genocide of the Roma people during the Second World War. In fact, it was not formally recognised until 1982 when Helmut Schmidt, then chancellor of West Germany, formally recognised that Nazi Germany had committed genocide against the Sinti and Roma.

The Roma Holocaust might have been forgotten if the Roma themselves had not struggled to keep the memory of the victims alive. We must end together the silence that lasted for decades. Europe has a duty to face up to its legacy and to learn from its past mistakes.

Unfortunately, the suffering of the Roma people did not end with the Second World War. Today, Roma still face racially-motivated discrimination, hate speech, hate crimes, violence and persecution across Europe.

The rise of far-right political parties across Europe nourishes anti-Gypsyism along with anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-immigrant narratives. There are still cases of deeply rooted anti-Gypsyism.

Recent examples include an ethnically motivated killing or hate speech statements against Roma. Such a poisonous ideology must not be allowed to grow in contemporary Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Council of Europe is the protector of human rights in Europe, and fighting anti-Gypsyism is one of our top priorities.

We have worked with scholars to elaborate materials for the teaching about the Roma Holocaust. Innovative projects and tools are promoted to foster knowledge of the common history of Roma and non-Roma. We wish to encourage the recognition of the Roma Holocaust and to acknowledge the contribution of Roma to Europe's historical and cultural heritage. Giving the history of Roma its rightful place in the history of Europe is crucial for building trust between Roma and non-Roma.

The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) was launched last year in Berlin as a joint initiative of the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations and the Alliance for ERIAC. ERIAC exists to increase the self-esteem of Roma and to decrease negative prejudice of the majority population towards the Roma by means of arts and culture.

This is essential for our struggle to achieve for all Roma a life in dignity, essential for ending hate and persecution, and essential for a future where Roma across Europe enjoy human rights in freedom, security and equality.

In conclusion, I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to and to remember all who lost their lives during the darkest moment of European history, whether Roma or Sinti, Jews, homosexuals, people with disabilities, or members of other minority groups.

We must never allow ourselves to forget. We must remember.

Thank you for your attention.