



**Commemoration Ceremony  
on the occasion of the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day**

Strasbourg, 2 August 2018

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President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF)**

Dear Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

We are gathered here today to pay homage to the victims of the *Pharrajimos* – to the Roma men, women and children murdered in the extermination camp of Auschwitz on 2 August 1944, but also the hundreds of thousands of Roma, 6 million of Jews, thousands of homosexuals, Witnesses of Jehovah and political dissidents were equally exterminated in several Nazi concentration camps throughout Europe.

They were exterminated because they were **aliens, outsiders not fitting the nationalistic model** set up by the Nazi regime.

**We thought the nightmare was over. We were wrong!**

The Roma were no longer locked up in concentration camps but were **relegated to miserable settlements**, from which they could be evicted at any time. They were no **longer gassed** but **excluded** from all means of getting a **decent living** and **frequently assaulted** for no reason whatsoever.

Only recently, in the Ukraine men entered a Roma settlement and killed two men and injured a woman. **Their crime? They were Roma!**

In a survey carried out in 2016 - that is 71 years after the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world War - the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union found that ***“some of the 80% of Roma surveyed live below their countries’ at-risk-of-poverty threshold; every third Roma lives in housing without tap water; every third Roma child goes to bed hungry at least once a month, and 50% of Roma between the ages of six and 24 do not attend school.”*** School segregation continues to be practised in some of the member states, and discrimination is widespread in employment and other areas.

Promoting **hatred of the “outsider”** is a well-known fascist ploy which led to the genocide we are commemorating today.

Extreme right wing, xenophobic parties are no longer a marginal phenomenon. **They are represented in parliaments and in coalition governments.**

In Italy the far-right leader and minister for the interior Matteo Salvini lost no time in proposing a screening of all the Roma, threatening to deport all non-Italian Roma from Italy and adding “unfortunately, we have to keep the Italian ones”.

In a recent article in the Irish Times Frinlan O’Toole rightly says **“Fascism doesn’t arise suddenly in an existing democracy. It is not easy to get people to give up their ideas of freedom and civility. You have to do trial runs that, if they are done well, serve two purposes. They get people used to something they may initially recoil from; and they allow you to refine and calibrate.** This is what is happening now and we would be fools not to see it. People have to be given the taste for savagery. Fascism does this by building up the sense of threat from a despised out-group.”

Ladies and gentlemen,

**This is not just the commemoration of a past event. It is a wake-up call for what is awaiting us if we don't act.** Fascism, anti-Gypsyism and anti-Semitism are on the increase. I therefore call on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Committee of Ministers to put back on their political agenda the raise of the anti-Gypsyism and the anti-Semitism and consider new and effective approaches on how to intervene and combat an national/member state level these frightening phenomena, which is no longer transmitted secretly but openly and loudly.

**SO, SHALL WE JUST SIT DOWN AND WAIT OR SHALL WE STAND UP AND FIGHT JOINTLY AGAINST IT?**