

Romani Rose, President of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the beginning I would like to welcome the Survivors who are with us today.

The historic date of 2 August has firmly rooted in the collective memory of our minority. That very day, in 1944, the last remaining members of our minority in Auschwitz-Birkenau, who survived terror and destruction until that moment, were killed in gas chambers. They did not have the chance to put up with the overwhelming power of the executioners, although they defended themselves desperately, as we know from witnesses reports. August 2, 1944 is one of the darkest days in the history of our minority.

The name "Auschwitz" is not only a symbol of genocide committed on our minority but also an escape from everything that creates humanity and civilization. Auschwitz was a part of the extensive system of extermination created by the Nazis and their assistants. The network of concentration camps, mass executions and collective graves of the murdered members of our minority cover the whole of Europe. More than half a million Roma and Sinti were victims of genocide organized by state institutions. Majority of the victims were children and young people.

After this terrible historical experience, the peoples of Europe in the arduous process of reconciliation and integration have created a vision of democratic rule of law that underpins common European values.

Today it seems that the achievement of an open, democratic society is increasingly being questioned. Nationalist and populist movements are dividing Europe. Many countries face growing polarization of society and radicalization of political views. Also in Germany, nationalist and populist groups are gaining in popularity, spreading radical and discriminatory views.

For us, Roma and Sinti, these aggravating social conflicts are a great threat. Anti-democratic movements need enemy images to channel public fears and use them for their political purposes. In many countries, especially in Eastern Europe, the social situation of Roma minorities is dominated by ubiquitous anti-culture. It is particularly firmly rooted in state institutions, so that a large

part of our minority is given the chance to live in dignity and development. The stigmatization of the Roma and Sinti in the media, which constantly disseminate anticycotic stereotypes, is also an important factor in strengthening this phenomenon. This is reminiscent of the infamous Nazi propaganda magazine "Der Stürmer", which all people of Jewish origin attributed to "racial inferiority" and innate predisposition to crime. Today, with regard to our minority, the crimes committed by single people are treated as "typical" features for our ethnic group.

In this way, one of the foundations of our democratic social and legal order is trampled on, namely the principle that it is the sole responsibility of the individual to act alone.

In democracy, whole ethnic group is not collectively responsible for the individual deeds. Whoever does this, openly or in an allusion, propagates racism and is guilty of the violence against members of our minority.

So-called "hate crime" committed on members of our minority, including murders, are on the agenda in many countries, and perpetrators need not fear legal consequences. Because of this, many successful Roma and Sinti are afraid to admit their origins because they fear discrimination in work and in private life. We must finally break this vicious circle. Open admission to belonging to a minority can not be a reason for depriving a person of equal opportunities and participation in social life in any European country. National and cultural identity should not be considered as contradictory. In this respect, public policy and institutions, especially schools and other educational institutions, bear the same responsibility as the media and the public.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Europe has the chance to survive only if in the times of crisis and terrorist threat do not betray its most basic values. Independent media and an independent judicial system guarantee everyone's personal freedom. We must not allow Europe to re-enter the darkness but we must fight against the destruction of our rule of law.

All of the innocent people who have been brutally deprived of their lives here oblige us to do so.

Thank you for your attention.