

**Romani Rose,  
Central Council of German Sinti and Roma**

**INTERPARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Fundamental rights aspects of Roma inclusion and fighting anti-Gypsyism**

Brussels, 18 October 2018

Honorable chair Moraes  
dear ladies and gentlemen

Let me thank the LIBE Committee for this outstanding initiative to discuss the fight against antigypsyism and the respect for fundamental rights of Sinti and Roma with Members of Parliament from all over Europe.

The European Parliament resolution on addressing antigypsyism of October 2017 is of fundamental importance to Sinti and Roma in Europe. For the first time, antigypsyism in Europe has been widely addressed as the cause of hatred, violence, discrimination and social exclusion, directly affecting large parts of the minority. Antigypsyism just like antisemitism has been deeply rooted in European history for centuries. It manifests itself as a racial prejudice in the population, as dehumanization, as racist violence, as well as structural racism in many institutions of the European states.

Antigypsyism, this specific form of racism, prevents the equal participation of Sinti and Roma in almost all areas of society. If we talk about the desolate housing situation or the largely poor educational situation and in particular the segregation of Roma in schools, then we have to understand these well-documented disadvantages as what they are: as materialized racism.

In many European countries Roma were and often still are treated and stigmatized as a so-called social problem, what governments were trying to solve in so-called anti-poverty strategies. Such approaches often ignore and deny the underlying antigypsyism and contribute to reproducing the circle of exclusion and racism. The victims of structural racism are blamed for their desolate situation.

Recent evaluations of the European Framework Strategy for Roma clearly show that the fight against the mechanisms of antigypsyism are central to making inclusion and anti-discrimination programs a success.

The fight against antigypsyism is first of all not the responsibility of the minority itself. It is the task of the majority society and its institutions. It is the task of the European institutions and the European states, because Sinti and Roma are equal citizens of their home countries.

We can see recently significant progress in the political debate on antigypsyism. At the same time, the rejection of Sinti and Roma in the population is still extreme, as shown by studies of the Fundamental Rights Agency or in Germany by the Equality Body. This rejection together with the growing extreme nationalism in recent years, is becoming more and more violent, and increasingly threatens the Roma minority in almost all European countries.

In Germany as well as in Europe, Sinti and Roma are facing increasing violence. A week ago, 17-year-old boy Goszko was murdered in Montana, Bulgaria, while collecting hay with his grandfather. In Berlin, this summer a man shot at playing Roma children in the neighboring house. The list of such hate crimes against Roma in recent years is long. Law enforcement and the judiciary must properly investigate and prosecute these cases, as well as consider and identify the antigypsyist motives of hate violence.

In Italy, we must denounce the declaration by the Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini, to initiate a special registration of Sinti and Roma, as a targeted push to dissolve the borders of the rule of law of the Italian state. It follows, in the tradition of fascist regimes, first the expulsion of migrants from Italy and then the exclusion of national minorities from citizenship. Roma with an Italian passport have to be kept "unfortunately", the Italian Minister of Interior had declared.

Just a few weeks ago, the mayor of the German city Duisburg heated up a racist discussion about the alleged abuse of social systems. He first stated that criminal human traffickers would bring Roma from Romania to Duisburg, and then said several times in various public statements (I quote): *"I have to deal with people who mess up entire streets and aggravate the rat problem."*

Anyone who has studied German history knows that the Nazis systematically propagated this image of "rats" against Jews. This association of "rat problem" with allegations against the minority builds hatred in our society and makes Sinti and Roma the target of a potentially violent antigypsyism.

Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot talk about antigypsyism without addressing at the center of reflection its most extreme and radical form, the extermination of 500,000 Sinti and Roma in the Holocaust. The National Socialist State collectively and definitively denied the right of existence to the members of our minority on the basis of an inhuman racial ideology, simply because they were born Sinti or Roma. Already the infamous Nuremberg race laws of 1935 were applied to Sinti and Roma as well as to Jewish people. Thus began a process of deprivation of rights and of persecution, which finally ended in the intended extermination of all Sinti and Roma as well as all Jews in Europe.

It took decades in Germany, until the Federal Government recognized the Holocaust of the Sinti and Roma in Nazi-occupied Europe in the year 1982 - as a result of decades of civil rights work by the Sinti and Roma. The recognition of the Roma genocide by the European Parliament three years ago in April 2015 was a historic step for our minority. The resolution designates 2 August as the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, and calls upon EU Member States explicitly to recognize the genocide.

There are also other positive developments in the fight against antigypsyism. Based on a motion for a resolution by the German Bundestag, the Federal Government will soon convene an Independent Expert Commission on Antigypsyism, as demanded by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma for several years. This body aims to investigate the causes, manifestations and consequences of antigypsyism in Germany, as well as to develop counter-strategies. Once per legislative period, a corresponding report should be submitted to Parliament, on the basis of which the Federal Government will implement further counter-strategies. A budget of € 500,000 has already been designated for the Expert Commission in 2019 and we greatly welcome the fact that the Federal

Government has been investing annually several million euros in civic education about antigypsyism for the last few years now. In addition, a first research center on antigypsyism was established at the University of Heidelberg.

The European Parliament resolution of October 2017 recommends that EU Member States establish such expert commissions on antigypsyism at national level - so-called Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. I urge you to take these initiatives to the national parliaments!

Today's conference shows that the fight against antigypsyism has reached the political agenda. This event is also a continuation of our first high-level international conference on antigypsyism, which took place in 2016 at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin in cooperation with the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The conference addressed the important role of political leaders in the fight against antigypsyism. At this conference, an initiative was developed to build an international "Parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antigypsyism". It would be an important step if our conference today could advance such a coalition against antigypsyism in order to bring together members from national parliaments, the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, as well as the European Parliament.

Ladies and gentlemen, the development towards a democratic Europe, the democracy in which we live today, was and is not a matter of course. Antigypsyism, like antisemitism, is aimed primarily at the Sinti and Roma or at the Jews, but in fact, they are an attack on democracy, on the rule of law and our common European values. Above all, therefore, antigypsyism in Europe must finally be banned, sanctioned and consistently fought.

This requires the commitment of all of us, and therefore we expect from the European Commission and the EU Member States that the fight against antigypsyism will become an integral part of all policies, and thus become the core of a European Framework Strategy for Roma after the year 2020.