

## **Wolfgang Bosbach<sup>1</sup>**

### Opening words

Following the impressive address by Zoni Weisz on the occasion of Holocaust Memorial Day and even before the EU adopted its national Roma strategy, the factions of the CDU/CSU and the FDP tabled the motion for "Improvement of the situation of the Sinti and Roma in Europe" in the German Bundestag and started the implementation of the EU specifications for national Roma strategies. The governing coalition made it clear that Sinti and Roma are citizens of their respective state and regard themselves as such. Nevertheless, Roma in Europe are still subject to intolerance and discrimination, economically and socially marginalized and stigmatised - and often confronted by overt xenophobic violence.

The extent of this violence today is at a level which was unimaginable even a few months ago. In addition to the attempted murders by right-wing extremists in Germany, there was a series of murders in Hungary between 2008 and 2009 with eleven victims. There have been similar acts of violence in other countries which were marked by xenophobic and violent racism. The constitutional state, which must guarantee the safety all of its citizens and may not relinquish its monopoly on the use of force to self-proclaimed "defence leagues" and "guards" under any circumstances, is challenged here. The European Union and the OSCE are similarly challenged to protect and stand up for the human rights of Roma in Europe.

The minorities discussion group on the Committee of the Interior of the German Bundestag informed itself once again about the position and situation of Sinti and Roma in Germany in its session in Berlin on 26th October 2011. The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma presented its position paper in this framework with specific demands with regard to the social participation with equal rights of Sinti and Roma in Germany. It was agreed to the effect that any policy should be measured by the extent to which the stated intentions are actually implemented at local level. In this respect, what applies to all policy areas is that any programme requires the integration and approval of the members of the minority it affects at the local level, especially in the area of education.

The European Commission has left it open to the Member States whether they wish to develop and implement a national strategy or individual program packages for the equal participation of Roma in Europe. It became clear from the statements and in the discussion that the subject of Sinti and Roma is a cross-sectional task which challenges the Federal Government, Federal States and communities in a similar manner. It was also pointed out that the Bundestag must have an interest in asking the Federal Government about the status of implementation of the defined national goals and objectives.

Roma were persecuted in the period of National Socialism because of their origin and their group affiliation and more than 500,000 of them - men, women and children – were murdered. The Federal Republic of Germany has a special historical responsibility towards the Roma. This obligation applies to Sinti and Roma in Germany and also in Europe.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Bosbach (Christian Democratic Union) is Member of the German Bundestag since 1994 and Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee in the German Bundestag.