

Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma

OSZE-ODIHR

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Side Event:

"Combatting Hate Speech, Racism and Incitement against Roma and Sinti in Election Campaigns"

Statement by Romani Rose,

Chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

Dear Mr. Director,
Excellencies,
Dear ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, I cordially welcome you to this event. I thank Mr. Link for his explicit words.

Antigypsyism is just as anti-Semitism rooted in European history for centuries. Today this particular form of racism is a targeted and systematic policy of exclusion and racism, as practiced by right-wing extremist parties in particular in the election campaign, but also by nationalist governments of various countries in Eastern and Western Europe. This is reflected in particular in a massive and violent hate speech on the internet.

The underlying pattern is well-known: the entire minority is always held responsible for individual topics, be they refugees from the Western Balkans - who are pitted against refugees from Syria; be they migrants from Romania and Bulgaria, who supposedly came as Roma solely because of our social welfare systems from the local poverty ghettos to Germany. It is always the entire minority, German Sinti as well as migrant Roma, who are overall defamed and marginalized through such images.

Right-wing parties often build their campaign exclusively on this racism against Roma, but it is the majority parties, which take up this racism often enough, legitimize it and thus make it socially acceptable.

In the German election campaign in 2013 the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) systematically targeted our minority with its racism, discriminatory hate speech and incitement through posters and leaflets. Such a shape and such a degree of public exclusion against the minority had not happened since 1945. Through the NPD boycott calls with the poster "Money for grandma instead of for Sinti and Roma" and with the leaflets "Stop gypsy flood!" - with the image of a gun and knife - Sinti and Roma were represented as a threat to the population. These NPD calls joined analogously to the calls for a boycott by the Nazis, who in the same way excluded a minority from society under the slogan "Do not buy from Jews."

This campaign constitutes a massive action of group-focused enmity directed against a minority that is based in Germany for centuries and that has been exposed to a state-organized genocide under National Socialism, which had been initiated and justified using the same methods against Sinti and Roma and against Jews. Nearly 70 years after the Holocaust, there must be no place for such an incitement to racial hatred.

The strategy behind this approach is easy to understand: The NPD tried to exploit the fears of the population for the security of pensions, in order to incite hatred against the minority and to draw political capital from it in this way. The right-wing extremists know that these strategies are welcomed in parts of our society with sympathy - similar is the case with anti-Semitic slogans.

Among our older people who survived the Holocaust and among whom the experience of Nazism always remains present, massive fears were growing again. The NPD campaign revives again propagandistic patterns and exclusion mechanisms of the Nazi state.

A number of mayors in Germany intervened based on the inciting character against the poster campaign of the NPD. They deserve great respect. It is shameful and it is scandalous for our democratic legal system that they were forced by the administrative courts, to hang up the posters again. These decisions obviously lacked not only any historical sensibility, but also the awareness that such incitement is prohibited by international treaties.

Thereas, explicitly (quote):

"Propaganda activities are to be banned which promote or incite racial discrimination" (Article 4 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination).

In addition (quote):

"Any discrimination on grounds of membership to a national minority is prohibited", as stated by the "Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities", which also legally applies to the German Sinti and Roma since 1998.

These legal prohibitions draw boundaries for the freedom of expression, which have to be respected and enforced not only in Germany, but in the whole OSCE area.

Following an initiative of the Central Council the German federal government organized in December 2014 in Berlin a symposium on this subject under the title "Boundaries in the political struggle of opinion - How to deal with racial prejudice and discriminatory ideologies". The Central Council felt it was extremely important that there the Minister of Interior Affairs, Thomas de Maizière, and the Minister of Justice, Heiko Maas, found in their speeches very explicit words to ostracize and condemn any practices of racist election campaigns against Sinti and Roma and against other minorities.

We know that political parties in Eastern as well as in Western Europe such as Ataka, Jobbik, the Lega Nord, the Front Nationale, etc. run their election campaign almost exclusively based on their hate speech against Roma. The examples presented by the following speakers show us how racist and populist election campaigns are held at the expense of our minority in Hungary and Bulgaria. We must assume that there is a direct link between the violent attacks on Roma and Sinti in the various European countries and the specific antigypsyist and racist rhetoric of parts of the political elite.

For this reason the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, calls upon the OSCE to

- Outlaw in general antigypsyism as well as anti-Semitism. Antigypsyism is not only a direct threat to Roma in the OSCE region, but it constitutes a threat to our democracy and our community of values.
- We call upon the OSCE to document antigypsyism as part of its election observation missions and to respond with their institutions.
- Finally, the OSCE should encourage the Member States to enforce the relevant international agreements such as the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe, which prohibits any discrimination on grounds of membership to a national minority.

Thank you.

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