

**OSCE-ODIHR**

**Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2018**

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Bremeneckgasse 2  
69117 Heidelberg

Fon: 06221 – 9811-01

Fax: 06221 – 9811-90

zentralrat@sintiundroma.de

www.sintiundroma.de

### **Statement by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma**

Excellencies,

The political participation of Roma and Sinti is strongly affected by the virulent and structural antigypsyism, which is rooted in European history for centuries. Antigypsyism is the specific racism towards Roma and Sinti and others who are stigmatized as 'gypsies' in the public imagination. 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.

Although the term is finding increasing institutional recognition, there is as yet no common understanding of its nature and implications. It is essential to see that antigypsyism is not a 'minority issue'. It is a phenomenon of our societies, which has its origin in how the social majority view and treat those whom they consider 'gypsies'. To combat antigypsyism, our attention needs to shift to mainstream societies, while raising the voices of those who are dramatically affected by antigypsyism, but also usually silenced by it.

Roma and Sinti are frequently silenced, intimidated, threatened and structurally excluded in particular during election campaigns as a result of antigypsyism. The multiple manifestations of hate speech, incitement and violence have dramatic effects on the political participation of Roma and Sinti. Politicians and political parties not only from far-right but also from mainstream political parties often draw on resentment and prejudice against Roma and Sinti. They do so in order to win votes through populist strategies and the scapegoating of minorities. The steady repetition of racist public discourse during election campaigns maintains a high level of stigmatization, racism, antigypsyism, antisemitism, islamophobia, and hate speech within politics, media, and society. 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.

A recent resolution of the European Parliament highlights the devastating impact of antigypsyism on the equal social and political participation of Roma and Sinti in Europe. The resolution of 25 October 2017 on "*Fundamental rights aspects in Roma integration in the EU: fighting anti-Gypsyism*", calls upon the European Commission and EU Member States to put the fight against antigypsyism at the forefront of efforts for the social and economic inclusion of Roma. The resolution calls upon the EU and Member States to establish a European, as well as national Truth and Reconciliation Commissions to acknowledge the persecution, exclusion and disownment of Roma throughout the centuries and to document these in an official white paper. In this regard, the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma highly welcomes the decision of the new German governmental coalition of March 2018 to establish an expert commission on antigypsyism.

The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma calls upon the OSCE

- To follow the Council of Europe and European Union to recognize antigypsyism as a specific form of racism, which constitutes the root cause of the exclusion of Roma and Sinti and a key barrier to their political participation;
- To adopt a Ministerial Council decision that strengthens the mandate of ODIHR to monitor and combat antigypsyism and to enhance the political participation of Roma and Sinti as key

priorities for an effective implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti;

- To monitor antigypsyism as part of the OSCE election observation missions, and to respond with its institutions.

The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma calls upon the OSCE Participating States

- To establish national Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, or Expert Commissions on Antigypsyism in order to analyse the long-lasting, structural barriers to the equal public and political participation of Roma and Sinti, and in order to develop counter-strategies;
- To sanction antigypsyism as well as antisemitism with all available legal and political tools.

The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma calls upon the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Members of Parliament of the Participating States and political parties

- To endorse and respect the revised Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society;
- To establish a Parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antigypsyism in order to confront antigypsyism by condemning prejudice, discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes in the public discourse, in particular by refraining from and condemning stigmatization of Roma and Sinti during electoral campaigns;
- To strengthen diverse leadership by engaging in dialogue and networks between political parties and Roma civil society; also by reaching out to Roma to be politically active and to become members and candidates of political parties.