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OSCE-ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019

Working session 16 (specifically selected topic): Roma and Sinti

Title: “Roma and Sinti participation in public and political life”

Statement of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

Chair, honourable delegates,

This year we commemorated on 2 August the 75th anniversary of the day when the Nazis murdered the last 4.300 Sinti and Roma at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. This day is recognized as the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day to commemorate the 500.000 Sinti and Roma that were murdered in Nazi occupied Europe. **We call upon the OSCE and the participating states to fully recognize the Holocaust of Sinti and Roma, as well as to strengthen the research, remembrance and education.** This genocide should be equally addressed by the states and Sinti and Roma representatives should fully participate during the commemoration activities for the International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January. Recognition and remembrance of the history of persecution and racism is a major step on the path towards the equal participation of Sinti and Roma.

Honorable delegates, in the same week when we commemorated the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, a major German TV broadcaster screened an outraging racist production. On August 7, the German media house SAT1 broadcasted the pseudo-documentary “Roma: people between poverty and bragging”, a film that represents Sinti and Roma in the most disgusting and racist way. The production associates discriminated Roma communities with massive crime. Criminality is declared as an issue of ethnic origin. The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma took the necessary measures in order that the regulatory authorities initiate investigations and sanctioning measures.

The Central Council welcomes that this session addresses the participation of Roma and Sinti in public and political life. However, as a starting point of any policy debate in this context, we need to recognize antigypsyism as a specific form of racism – the root cause that historically and structurally led to the current situation of exclusion and marginalization of Sinti and Roma in Europe. Antigypsyism is not a ‘minority issue’. 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.

However, antigypsyism is not just widespread in the media and other fields of public life. It is also visible in its structural form in the limited diversity and lack of representation and participation of Sinti and Roma in institutions and structures on all levels.

Therefore in particular in the media context, the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma recommends to the OSCE participating states that Sinti and Roma representatives are appointed to broadcasting councils and state media authorities.

Racist discourses and hate speech are a major obstacle to the public participation of Sinti and Roma, creating an atmosphere that silences voices of Sinti and Roma communities and forcing many people to hide their identity. Such discourses are taken up in racist election campaigns, as we have documented in Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Spain. Furthermore, the perpetuation of antigypsyism in the mainstream media provokes hate speech on the Internet, legitimizes hate and violence against minorities and poses a great danger for the well-being of Sinti and Roma.

The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma together with the national expert body on online hate speech (jugendschutz.net) documented several thousand pieces of antigypsyist content on the Internet, identifying a variety of discriminatory stereotypes. More than 400 violations of youth protection law and often criminal law were documented. The majority of the violations found were posted on the social media accounts of traditional media, i.e. in comment sections of YouTube channels. In addition, the rate of escalation in the commentary sections was striking: Antigypsyist statements mutually reinforced each other up to inhuman representations and explicit calls for violence.

Biased media content and articles about Roma in other European countries are utilised to construe Roma as “inferior” and incite hatred. At the same time manipulated pictures and “fake news” are often spread. The emotional tone and sometimes subtle manipulation make it especially difficult for young users to identify the media content as hate speech.

While other racist ideologies receive increased attention in their online manifestation, antigypsyism is rarely addressed. There is a lack of social awareness of antigypsyist hate content: many stereotypes

are reproduced unquestioningly, and many false claims are widely accepted. Continued intensive monitoring is key to raising awareness and informing key stakeholders, including decision-makers, and increase the political will and mobilization of civil society and government institutions.

Roma and Sinti in Europe are particular targeted by racism, hate speech, and incitement during election campaigns. Politicians and political parties not only from the far-right but also from mainstream political parties often draw on resentments and prejudices 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 statements in the public discourse during election campaigns maintains a high level of stigmatization, racism, antigypsyism, antisemitism, islamophobia, and hate speech within politics, media, and society.

The Central Council urges all participating states to fully implement their laws and international commitments to sanction any form of hate speech, racism and antigypsyism in the public discourse. The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma calls on the OSCE to monitor and intervene against antigypsyism in media and as online hate speech.

The OSCE and the OSCE participating states need to recognize antigypsyism in order to successfully progress in the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti. **The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma urges the Ministerial Council and the OSCE participating States to recognize and combat antigypsyism, to strengthen the OSCE mandate in this regard, as well as to equip the ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues with the necessary political mandate, funding and resources.**

As a result of the long-lasting resistance and civil rights struggle of Sinti and Roma organizations in Europe, we can finally see progress in the recognition of antigypsyism by certain international organizations and governments, the OSCE has to follow this policy progress.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe adopted in 2011 a policy recommendation on combating antigypsyism. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution in 2017 calling on national parliaments to mobilise against antigypsyism and all forms of racism and intolerance. The European Parliament passed key resolutions in 2015, 2017 and 2019 to recognize the Holocaust of Sinti and Roma, to address the complex mechanisms of institutional antigypsyism and its impact on the public and political participation of Sinti

and Roma, as well as to propose clear policy responses and strategies how to combat antigypsyism. The Parliament demanded to put the fight against antigypsyism at the forefront of efforts for the social and economic inclusion of Roma. The lack of recognition and responses to antigypsyism were identified by the European Commission as one of the major obstacles for political progress, which is now being addressed in the post-2020 strategy debate. The international civil society “Alliance Against Antigypsyism” proposed a “Working Definition of Antigypsyism” and recently published recommendations for holistic counter-strategies. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance as well aspires to develop a working definition of antigypsyism to provide guidelines to assist in identifying incidents and manifestations of antigypsyism.

We recommend that OSCE Participating States establish “Expert Commissions on Antigypsyism” or so-called “Truth and Reconciliation Commissions” that analyse the historical and structural impact that antigypsyism has caused as a barrier to the public and political participation of Sinti and Roma in the specific country. Such Commissions can help to acknowledge the persecution, exclusion and disownment of Sinti and Roma in the past and its implications for today’s situation and to create awareness for the systemic exclusion that Sinti and Roma face.

The German OSCE Chairmanship hosted in 2016 the first major high-level OSCE conference that addressed antigypsyism, and that was co-organized with ODIHR, the Council of Europe and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma. The conference demanded a strong coalition-building among political leaders to counter discrimination and increasing manifestations of racism and xenophobia against Roma and Sinti. The international community has increasingly called on political leaders for a responsible role and leadership in promoting Roma inclusion and addressing all forms of racism and discrimination, including antigypsyism.

A key conclusion of the conference was the need to establish a coalition of political leaders that work together in combating antigypsyism, to advocate for equality, non-discrimination and inclusion societies. **The Central Council calls upon the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament and Members of national Parliaments to establish this Parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antigypsyism (PCCA).**