

Address by the Minority Ombudsman on the occasion of International Roma Day

Dear Mr. President!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear guests, friends of Romani culture!

I was pleased to accept the invitation of President János Agócs: it is an honor to greet you personally as the patron of the event. Despite the well-known factors that make our encounter today difficult, it is good to see that so many of you are present here.

This year, 2020, is unusual: the epidemic that emerged and then has flared up in waves has significantly transformed our lives and is shaping our daily lives as well. Furthermore, it's autumn time, and let's face it: we'd love to rest for a few more days and we are reluctant to let the moments of summer and summer relaxation go, just as much as our children do, who spend the first week of school. I wish that we'll be able to preserve during the year the energy we have accumulated in recent weeks.

A month ago, here in the same place we commemorated a sad event: the Roma Holocaust, the clash of selfish destruction and self-sacrificing heroism, but today we can see hope and the future: on the International Roma Day we celebrate a Romani culture that has enriched the Hungarian and universal civilization with its values for centuries. The fact that this can only take place five months after the official memorial day due to the pandemic enriches the basic call with another symbolic message: let us deal with Roma culture not only on April 8, but today and all 365 days of the year!

- Let it become a part of our lives!

- Let's get to know it all over!

- Let's understand, enjoy and support Romani culture!

- Let us also make the world understand that the Hungarian people of Roma nationality are important, useful and irreplaceable members of our society as Hungarian citizens.

In the framework of the celebration, I would like to emphasize that our Roma compatriots, as outstanding artists, athletes, engineers, doctors, lawyers, social workers, teachers or as other professionals and public figures, create lasting values and with their achievements they set an example for the mainstream society as well.

And let us not forget the hard-working Roma people who, as physical workers have made and continue to make a significant contribution to enriching Hungary's public and private buildings, transport infrastructure or economic power. This activity is as respectable as the special constructions created, which both Roma and non-Roma members of the Hungarian society can be proud of.

Their example is often more valuable in my eyes than the achievements of any other talented person, precisely because I know how difficult it is to proudly embrace the Roma nationality and culture by someone who, in addition to the benefits of his identity, may face adverse consequences in many areas of life day by day.

And let's stop here for a moment: the situation of the Gypsies in Hungary is unfortunately not determined by the ethnic and legal peculiarities of the Roma community. Poverty and social exclusion, both separately and together, are a sad phenomenon that runs counter to human dignity as a fundamental right! The fact that many of our Roma compatriots in Hungary are much more likely to face the challenges of poverty and social exclusion than a non-Roma means that the fight against poverty in Hungary is a particularly complex task. This, in turn, requires serious, coordinated and value-based, but most of all honest action from all stakeholders in society, especially the state, churches and NGOs.

One of today's greatest tasks of ours is to do everything at the micro level, in shaping social attitudes, to ensure that society has a healthy immune response to any form of discrimination, i.e. to enable everyone to recognize and be aware of various violations of rights, knowing what to do in case of the injury of his or her own or others' fundamental rights, and to whom, to which body or institution he or she may turn for redress. The other side of everyday, small-scale attitude-formation is just as important: to show the members of the mainstream society the values of ethnic communities and the countless long-term social, economic and cultural benefits of coexistence.

We should look for and support the Roma people, personalities who, by assuming their origin, can give hope, lead the way and even serve as role models for those who do not see the possibility of breaking out of their disadvantaged situation of today, the promise of a better future.

With the motto of the First World Romani Congress, I wish you and all of us a lot of strength, good health and success, trusting that by working together, we will be able to create the opportunity for a more beautiful and just life together.

Opre Roma! "Up Roma!"

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For nearly 50 years, on April 8, 1971, in Orpington, near London, the First World Romani Congress decided on the use of unified Roma national symbols, self-naming, and Opre Roma! slogan. To this day, this event is a significant stage in the formation of the institutionalized identity of the Roma. Later, in 1990 in Warsaw a decision was made at the 4th World Romani Congress to recognize the eighth of April, the date of the first World Congress, as an international Roma holiday. Later, in honor of the congress, the UN declared April 8 as World Day of Romani Culture.