

On Roma Holocaust Memorial Day deportations of Roma from Germany continue

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August 2 is the official day of remembrance of the Roma Holocaust. It commemorates the bestial murder of some 4,300 Roma and Sinti during the liquidation of the so-called “Gypsy Camp” at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in August 1944.

Away from the official events on this day, however, it becomes all too clear that even 77 years after this Nazi crime, the Roma cannot find a safe home in Germany. The callousness of the federal and state governments is expressed in Berlin, for example, where the Roma memorial in front of the Bundestag (parliament), which commemorates the 500,000 Sinti and Roma murdered under National Socialism (Nazism), is to fall victim to another new S-Bahn (urban transit) line less than ten years after its unveiling .

At the beginning of June, the Independent Commission on Antiziganism (Roma persecution), which was formed on behalf of the Bundestag and the government in 2019, issued recommendations against discrimination against Roma. The 843-page report calls for only a few concrete measures. The most important is certainly the demand for an immediate halt to all deportations of Roma from Germany.

It reads: “The Independent Commission on Antiziganism recommends to the federal government ... to put an end to the lack of prospects of those who have to live with the insecure status of having their residence tolerated. Concerning the practical application of the provisions of the Residence Act, it must be made clear that the Roma living in Germany are to be recognised as a group particularly worthy of protection for historical and humanitarian reasons. State governments and Aliens Departments are called upon to immediately end the practice of deporting Roma.”

But this is precisely what Federal Interior Minister

Horst Seehofer (Christian Democratic Union, CSU) categorically rejects on behalf of the federal government. It is true that in the press conference on July 13 he advocated some cosmetic measures, such as the appointment of a commissioner against antiziganism or the creation of a permanent federal-state commission. But he then quietly dropped the demand for an end to deportations.

Meanwhile, the federal and state governments are continuing the brutal deportation policy of recent years against Roma.

In 2020, 10,800 people were officially deported, more than 25 percent to the Western Balkans. Of the 2,787 people deported there, 761 were minors. The Western Balkan states include Albania and the former Yugoslav states of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Macedonia and Kosovo. In 2014 and 2015, the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) declared these six states to be so-called “safe countries of origin,” even though the Roma are massively discriminated against there. Almost all Roma there live in slums and have no access to health care and education.

This classification as “safe countries of origin” means almost all asylum applications from the Western Balkans are rejected. As a result, even people who have lived in Germany for decades, or since birth, face deportation. Whole families with children, single parents and severely disabled adults and children are affected.

On June 30, 2021, in the middle of the night, the city of Göttingen arrested the Islami married couple in their flat, who had been living in Germany for 30 years, placing them in hand and foot cuffs to deport them immediately to Serbia. The children and grandchildren who lived in the flat with the couple were completely shocked following

this brutal police action.

Both the parents in Serbia and the children and grandchildren in Germany are now left to fend for themselves. One adult daughter is severely mentally handicapped and needs permanent care, which the parents were able to provide for her until 2020 when she was placed in an institution against her parents' wishes. Mr. Islami has a physical and chronic mental illness. Ms. Islami is the sister of Gani Rama, who was deported to Kosovo two years ago and then murdered by a nationalist a short time later.

On July 22, about 50 people, including the Islami children, protested in front of the Göttingen Aliens Department against this brutal deportation. The children reported how their parents have been living in Belgrade since then and would be homeless without the support of the family in Germany. The father is also unable to buy his necessary medication in Serbia. The couple, who originally fled from Kosovo, also have language problems, as they both speak little Serbian.

In Celle, under the cover of darkness, the authorities deported a single mother with her severely disabled daughter to Serbia at the end of June. The six-year-old daughter is 90 percent disabled. She suffers from severe hearing loss with a resulting speech disorder, microcephaly, and hip dysplasia. The Celle Youth Welfare Office had appointed a supplementary carer to support the mother for years.

The mother had originally fled Serbia, where she was subjected to severe physical and psychological violence. About two weeks before the deportation, a supporter had filed a hardship application for the family. Despite the ongoing asylum court proceedings and the application for hardship support, the deportation was allowed to proceed, even though it presented "a serious threat to the child's well-being," as Sebastian Rose from the Refugee Council of Lower Saxony rightly put it in a nutshell.

In Bochum, the Destanov family of five is facing deportation to Northern Macedonia, from where they fled in 2015. The family has a five-year-old son who suffers from severe breathing problems as well as heart disease. The reason for their flight from Northern Macedonia was an arson attack on their home. The family was originally supposed to be deported on June 1, but protests prevented this, which at least made it possible for the five-year-old to have a heart examination at the end of July.

Stefani (14), from Hamburg, is facing deportation to Montenegro in August together with her siblings and mother. In March 2019, they had escaped the miserable

conditions there. In Germany, however, their asylum application was rejected under the pretext that they had entered "illegally." Despite very good grades at school, Stefani and her family face having bureaucratic obstacles to the prospect of staying placed in their way. According to German residence law, she would have had to attend school "regularly and successfully" for at least four years. But logically, this has only been possible for Stefani for two years. The corresponding committee of the Hamburg state parliament rejected the petition to forward her case to the hardship commission.

In Magdeburg, the Barjamovic family, who have lived there for ten years, are again being threatened with deportation to Serbia, after this was averted in 2015 and 2016 through loud protests. Discrimination and inhumane conditions were the reasons for their flight to Germany. A petition containing 52,000 signatures to support the family's right to stay was submitted to Magdeburg City Hall on July 14, 2021.

The Hardship Commission, which has been sitting on the case since last December, postponed its decision in mid-July. Seven-year-old Alex had to undergo emergency surgery in mid-July and his father is severely disabled with epilepsy. The youngest son, Mario, suffers from a rare hereditary disease and kidney stones. Seventeen-year-old son Josef has been dancing successfully for eight years in the "Break Borders Crew" and has already received several prizes and even won the title of German champion with the group in 2017.

Especially in Magdeburg, the memory of the crimes committed against the Roma by the Nazis is omnipresent. This is commemorated by two Roma monuments, one at Magdeburg Cathedral and the other at the Flora-Park shopping centre. During the Third Reich, the Holzweg-Silberberg forced labour camp was built near today's Flora Park, where Roma and Sinti were imprisoned from 1935. The memorial consists of a 1.80-metre-high marble stele with the names of 340 murdered people engraved on it. The dedication text at Flora Park reads: "These names are to commemorate the fate of the Sinti and Roma who were deported from the camp at Holzweg-Silberberg to Auschwitz and murdered on 01.03.1943."



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