

**PUBLIC STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN ROMA INSTITUTE FOR ARTS AND CULTURE
(ERiac)
REGARDING THE "MEMORIAL TO THE SINTI AND ROMA VICTIMS OF NATIONAL
SOCIALISM", THREATENED BY PLANS OF THE DEUTSCHE BAHN**

July 17, 2020

With deep preoccupation we have learned of the construction plans of the Deutsche Bahn which may affect "Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism" in Berlin. On behalf of European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERiac), we hereby call on the German government to protect the sacred site of Roma Holocaust Memory and to search for all possible solutions which guarantee that the "Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism" remains untouched. We stand in solidarity with families of the victims and survivors, in defense of the memory of the Sinti and Roma. History of the Sinti and Roma Holocaust must remain an integral part of the history of Germany, and Europe.

The Memorial represents how far we have come and how much still has to be done in the struggle for the memory of Roma Holocaust experience. It still does not form part of the European canon of history – most European countries do not officially commemorate the Roma Holocaust and do not include it in school curricula and textbooks. In most countries there are still no dedicated monuments to the Sinti and Roma victims of World War II, and sites of the Roma Holocaust remain unpreserved. For years referred to as the "forgotten Holocaust", the recognition of the crimes committed against Sinti and Roma people in Europe during the Nazi era was a hard-won battle led by Sinti and Roma, often descendants of Holocaust victims.

It was not until 1982 that Germany has formally acknowledged its historical responsibility for the mass extermination of Sinti and Roma. It took 20 years for the Memorial to Sinti and Roma Victims to be built. Inaugurated in 2012 by Federal President Joachim Gauck and Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, its opening represented a milestone in the decades-long struggle for the recognition of the Roma Holocaust.

Now, after only 8 years since its inauguration, the plans of the Deutsche Bahn in connection to the building of a new S-Bahn station threaten a removal, temporary closure or alteration of the Memorial. Such plans violate the memory of the Roma Holocaust victims and cast a shadow at Germany's commitment to Sinti and Roma rights. The destruction of this German and European symbol of Sinti and Roma suffering from public space would represent erasure of the Roma Holocaust from public consciousness. The monument itself, created by Jewish artist Dani Karavan, is a site-specific work of contemporary art which makes any partial interference with its original design unacceptable.

More importantly, acknowledging the past of Roma is crucial not only for justice and dignity of those who died during the Holocaust but is also needed to confront ongoing antigypsyism. Zeljko Jovanovic, Chair of the ERiac Board said: *"The Roma Holocaust Memorial is an important site of memory not only for Roma but also for Germans and Europeans. With growing radicalization and spread of far-right movements, now it is more important than ever to re-affirm the commitment to historical justice and fight for equality and respect of Sinti and Roma. The recent tragic acts of terrorism such as in Hanau remind us why remembering atrocities of the past is so relevant for the societies today."*