

Gordana Predić **Special Adviser, Ministry of Culture and Information**

Good evening,

It is an honour and pleasure to welcome everyone here on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and express our gratitude for the awarded recognition on behalf of the Deputy PM and Minister Maja Gojković.

All democratic societies aspire to having equal rights and duties before the law, regardless of ethnic identity, culture, language, religion, and background. The Roma ethnic minority is considered the largest minority in Europe. Ultimately, the accountability for developing social awareness about a responsible attitude among our citizens towards the issue of social inclusion of the Roma lies on policymakers, who are tasked to create a favourable social and legislative environment for social inclusion through clear decisions and enforcement of measures designed to combat ethnic tensions and prejudice.

The Ministry of Culture and Information plays an active role in defining and implementing policies with a view to achieve equality, inclusion, and participation of the Roma. Culture is an important part of these policies and a significant underpinning to measures that can concern completely separate parts of life such as social protection, health care, education, and employment.

For a number of years, the Ministry of Culture and Information has supported implementation of projects dealing with the Roma in the fields of both information and culture. Through its Call for co-funding minority language media content production projects, the Sector of information and the media supports the implementation of around twenty Romani language projects with 10 million RSD, while the Sector of contemporary creativity - through its own Call for minorities cultural production - supports around ten projects on average with approximately 1,7 million RSD.

Aside from these efforts made by civil servants and the National Council of the Roma National Minority, the sole existence of the European Roma Institute of Arts and Culture in present-day Serbia is of high relevance. ERIAC recognised the relevance of inclusion through culture as a precondition for social inclusion and as one of the efficient ways to fight antigypsyism. In this fight, a significant contribution in the cultural arena can come from Roma intellectuals, distinguished experts and professionals who would - as examples of best practices - be role models for the youth and flagships of developing mutual trust between the majority population and other ethnic minorities on the one side and the Roma ethnic minority on the other.

Therefore, the Tajsja Prize is a prize which - besides honouring individuals who are spearheading the Roma cultural movement - remains a legacy for the coming generations as the pride of all Roma and their compatriots. It acknowledges the importance of Roma cultural workers' creativity, virtuosity, and talents.

And so, it is precisely because all stated above that we are thrilled to be present at today's award ceremony. We wish you many happy returns and a constant challenge before the selection committees.

Thank you!