



**Video address by  
Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
on the 40th anniversary of the  
Central Council of German Sinti and Roma  
in Heidelberg  
on 7 April 2022**

Forty years ago, in February 1982, the German Sinti and Roma established a Central Council in order to work together for their civil rights and to draw greater attention to their concerns. Since then, your association has – you all have – achieved much for the Sinti and Roma national minority, and you have made a major contribution towards the harmonious and equal coexistence of the different peoples in our country.

The Central Council's fortieth anniversary is a reason for the German Sinti and Roma to celebrate, but it is also a reason for all citizens in our republic to feel joy and gratitude. From here in Schloss Bellevue in Berlin, I warmly congratulate you on this special anniversary!

Your association emerged from a civil rights movement that fought not least to ensure that the crimes committed by the National Socialists against the Sinti and Roma were officially recognised as genocide – a genocide which robbed half a million people in Europe of their lives, more than 20,000 of them in Germany.

Our country bears a responsibility to keep alive the memory of the crimes against humanity committed by the National Socialists. The Memorial here in Berlin to the Sinti and Roma of Europe murdered between 1933 and 1945 is a constant reminder to both state and society.

Never must we forget what happened then, because never again must it be allowed to happen. We must ensure that the stories of the persecuted Sinti and Roma and their descendants are kept alive, even when there are no longer any eye-witnesses to tell their stories – like the wonderful Zilli Schmidt, on whom I was honoured to confer our country's Order of Merit last year. And we must tread new paths to

encourage young people from all sections of society to engage with this chapter in Germany's history, too.

Remembrance also reminds us that racially motivated resentment did not simply disappear from our country once Europe had been liberated from National Socialism. Sinti and Roma were excluded and degraded in the fledgling Federal Republic, too; authorities, the police and the judiciary discriminated against, stigmatised or criminalised members of the minority; academics, politicians and the public covered up, denied or chose to ignore the genocide of the Sinti and Roma; claims for compensation went unrecognised for far too long.

On behalf of our country, I wish to ask forgiveness today also for this second suffering inflicted on the Sinti and Roma in the post-war period. And I want to tell you how grateful I am for the democratic engagement of the Central Council and how greatly I respect it. Because the fact that, over the past four decades, the German Sinti and Roma have not only fought for their interests and rights, but have remained constantly committed to dialogue, understanding and reconciliation, is something that can by no means be taken for granted. For that you have my heartfelt gratitude.

It is thanks to you and your perseverance that the Sinti and Roma in Germany have since 1995 been recognised as a national minority, like Danes, Frisians and Sorbs. That the diverse, centuries-old culture of the Sinti and Roma is visible and audible in many places in our country is your achievement. Above all else, again and again you bring together people from different sections of our society. You encourage dialogue and thus help to dismantle clichés and prejudices and foster understanding and respect.

And you all know from your own experience how important that is. Even today, Sinti and Roma in our country experience discrimination and marginalisation – in kindergartens and schools, in public authorities and in doctors' surgeries, when it comes to applying for jobs or renting flats. Moreover, they are again increasingly falling victim to racially motivated hatred and brutal violence, particularly in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, but also here in Germany. I need only remind you of the dreadful attack in Hanau in February 2020, where three young Roma were among those murdered and a Sinto was injured. I am grateful that Mehmet Daimagüler can now begin work as the first Federal Government Commissioner for the Fight against Antigypsyism, and I hope he will enjoy the necessary support to get things done.

Let us fight together as citizens of this country for harmonious coexistence in diversity! And let us fight together against antigypsyism, antisemitism and all forms of racism, against all forms of hatred, wherever we encounter them and no matter who they are directed against.

All of you in the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma can be proud that you have changed our society for the better. And each and every one of us in this country can be pleased and happy that you are among us. Please remain critical and engaged, in the next forty years too. All the best to you, and thank you very much!