

June 13 Remembrance Day! Expulsion of Roma from Kosovo

In the 14th century, Roma groups are documented to have settled in the Balkans. Documents of Tsar Dušan IV first mention the arrival of Roma in Prizren in 1348. In Ottoman times, which lasted until 1912, Roma were an important cultural and economic factor in Kosovar society. Their handicraft skills, especially blacksmithing, were valued. Many were serfs of Ottoman landlords.

With the rise of ethno-nationalist movements, Roma increasingly found themselves caught between the fronts of Albanians and Serbs, who each demanded absolute loyalty. In the Balkan Wars of 1912/1913, Muslim Albanians were portrayed as subhumans by Serbian propagandists. The goal of Albanian nationalists was an "ethnically pure" Greater Albanian Empire. Since then, Serbs, Jews and Roma were systematically persecuted in Kosovo, first by Albanian gangs, "Balli Kombetar," and in the course of World War II by the SS division "Skanderberg," which was assembled by Himmler from Albanian volunteers. Roma were forced to perform forced labor in Germany and in the occupied territories and were deported to concentration and death camps.

Many Kosovo Roma supported Tito's partisans in the fight against the German occupiers. The families of killed partisans were paid a survivor's pension. They were given the right to stay and the state subsidised their house building.

Since the early 1980s, there have been reports about the efforts of Kosovo Albanian nationalists for the "ethnic cleansing" of Kosovo from all non-Albanian minorities. After 1989, conflicts between Serbs and Albanians continued to escalate. The 1990s saw the emergence of the UÇK, a paramilitary organisation that fought for Kosovo's secession from Yugoslavia. The Kosovo Albanians, as well as politicians from NATO countries, claimed at the time that the Serbs were planning a genocide against the Albanians. To this day, there is no proof of this. However, the claim was used to justify the NATO bombing of the sovereign state of Yugoslavia in 1999, which began on 24 March 1999 and lasted 78 days.

The Tirana Academy of Sciences demanded in May 1999: "Albanians need their ethnically pure state". After the victory of NATO, the UÇK was able to implement its goal of "ethnic cleansing" Kosovo unhindered. Parallel to the NATO invasion, the UÇK occupied all places in Kosovo, destroyed settlements of Roma and other minorities and expelled the people. Especially since **13 June 1999**, Roma have been persecuted to an extent not seen since the occupation of the Balkans by the German Wehrmacht. Roma became victims of countless war crimes.

The ethnic cleansing of the Roma was linked to torture, rape, murder and mass looting and destruction, which the Kfor soldiers stood idly by. By March 2000, approximately 15,000 Roma homes had been destroyed. After the expulsion of 150,000 Roma from Kosovo, the abandoned houses and properties were occupied by Albanians.

Many Roma fled to refugee camps in Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, only a small part of the refugees reached Western European countries. The humanitarian situation in the refugee camps in the Balkans was catastrophic: water and food were scarce and there was a lack of medical care. Pogroms by Albanian nationalists led to further waves of refugees. In the spring of 2004, racist attacks against Roma occurred, which again led to mass expulsions and emigration.

The crimes against Roma in 1999 and afterwards have not been consistently prosecuted until today. After Kosovo's independence, many members of the extremist elite were able to attain high-ranking positions in politics, business and the police. The criminal networks founded by the UÇK still exist today, protected by widespread corruption and internationally influential commanders. Currently, several Kosovar politicians who were high-ranking UÇK members are on trial in The Hague for war crimes and crimes against humanity. One of them is Hashim Thaçi, who was Kosovo's president until 2020. The court is rejected by large parts of the Kosovar majority population.

To this day, Roma in Kosovo are not safe, as shown by [the murder of Gani Rama](#), who was murdered by a Kosovo Albanian nationalist after being deported from Germany.

On 13 June 1999, systematic ethnic cleansing against Roma in Kosovo began under the eyes of international organisations in the country.

Together with many international Roma organisations we demand:

The recognition of the ethnic cleansing through Germany and the other NATO countries involved.

The recognition of 13 June as an international day of remembrance for the expelled Roma from Kosovo.

