

**The Address by Jana Horváthová,  
Director of the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno,  
On the Occasion of  
The Day of Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity  
Spanish Hall, Prague Castle,  
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Eighty years ago, when the Soviet army liberated the Auschwitz complex, the Roma were no longer there. Their absence recalls another tragic date: August 2, 1943, when the remaining prisoners of the so-called "Gypsy Family Camp" at Birkenau—4,300 Roma and Sinti—were murdered in a single night. In total, over 20,000 European Roma and Sinti, including those from our own country, perished in the Auschwitz camp complex, out of the 22,000 who were imprisoned there.

The stories of these individuals remain largely unknown, so I will briefly share those we hold close to our hearts. In my Holomek family, up to a quarter of the prisoners were held in the Protectorate concentration camp at Hodonín near Kunštát. It brings me some solace that, since 2021, the Museum of Romani Culture has fully opened the Memorial and its extensive exhibitions at this site. Thirty members of our family did not survive the Holocaust; most of them perished in Auschwitz.

In December 1942, SS leader Heinrich Himmler issued an order that, the following year, led to the deportation of nearly all Roma and Sinti—referred to at the time as "Gypsies" and "Gypsy mixes"—from the Protectorate to Auschwitz. Among them was my grandfather's entire family, who had lived in the village of Svatobořice near Kyjov since 1917. All the adults were employed, and my grandfather, Tomáš, was the only Romani student at the Charles University Faculty of Law at the time. His nephew, Miroslav, was studying secondary school.

Tomáš Holomek, as a Romani man and law student, openly opposed the Nazi eugenic rhetoric claiming the Romani race was uneducable. This made him a particular target of Franz Herzig, the Reich German inspector of the German criminal police who oversaw the deportation of Roma from Moravia to Auschwitz. Herzig spoke of Tomáš to his subordinate gendarmes, one of whom warned him to flee immediately. Acting on this warning, Tomáš escaped and survived by hiding in Romani communities in Slovakia. The same fate did not await his three brothers and father. On March 19, they, along with the Romani wife of one brother, were deported to Auschwitz. The citizens of Svatobořice gathered to bid their neighbors a ceremonial farewell, offering gifts and food for the journey. Those being deported, dressed as though for a wedding, believed they were being sent for work. At the transport collection point—the Brno slaughterhouse—bribes of gold were offered to the gendarmes, and my grandfather was ultimately bought out. In the family archives, we still preserve a brief report written in German with an ink pencil. The commander of the gendarmerie station in Svatobořice reported that *Pavel Holomek, a Romani man, was released by the criminal directorate in Brno during the roundup of Roma on March 19*. However, Pavel knew his freedom was only temporary. He immediately went into hiding in the woods near Nesovice in Moravia. During the harsh winter of March, he found shelter in a hayloft, sleeping covered by hay to stay warm. Relying on the assistance of locals, Pavel Holomek was eventually denounced and, like them, deported to

Auschwitz with the August transport of prisoners from the concentration camp in Hodonín near Kunštát. By that time, his three sons had already perished. Čeněk, a trained locksmith with a talent for mathematics and the founder of the Svatobořice Football Club, succumbed to typhus. His brothers, Štěpán and Stanislav, along with a group of other Roma, attempted to escape but were captured. On May 27, 1943, they were executed in front of bunker 11 as a grim warning to others. As a treasured family memory, I have kept a message from Stanislav's Czech wife, Anna Čapková. It references a joint photograph of the two of them and is inscribed on the reverse of her elegant portrait—a beautiful likeness of a golden-haired lady—which she intended to give to her husband: *If you had known, at the moment this photograph was taken, smiling as you were, what would happen to you in a month—what would you have thought? I think about you all the time. Your wife.* Instead of an address, she wrote: *"It's fate! Just as you wrote in your last note to me when you bid me farewell with God. And you forgot to say goodbye! I will be happy again if you come home to me!"* Dated November 14, 1943—when Stanislav had already been dead for over five months.

Father Pavel Holomek perished in the gas chamber on the day the camp was liquidated. He was accompanied by his young daughter-in-law, Emílija, the wife of one of his sons. Emílija was a beautiful, kind, and vocally gifted woman, a trained seamstress who, according to Romani tradition, chose not to leave the elderly man alone. She could have saved herself by joining the transport of able-bodied prisoners to the Ravensbrück concentration camp but refused to abandon him.

Even my children are familiar with this difficult history of our family, and it is telling that they perhaps understand it better than some of their teachers. My middle daughter, Natálie, came home from a school field trip to the Auschwitz Memorial in tears after the teacher added Roma to the list of victims of the site and was told not to make things up.

It remains a sad reality that Romani history is not taught in our schools. The Roma have long been an integral part of Czech and world history. However, I firmly believe that this will soon change.

And perhaps, thanks to this shift, we will no longer have to hear, in the public sphere, expressions of ignorance or the perpetuation of myths promoted by the Nazis—such as the idea that Roma people are somehow predestined for something.

The fact remains that, like the Jews, the Roma suffered during the war—based on race, or ethnicity, as it was termed at the time. The Roma endured the Holocaust. Let us also learn the Romani expression corresponding to genocide: **Le Romengero murdaripen.**