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The National Fund mourns the loss of Board of Trustees Member Rudolf Sarközi

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“The death of Professor Rudolf Sarközi marks the loss of a tireless campaigner for the Roma and Sinti and their right to be recognized as an ethnic group and as victims of National Socialism in Austria”, reflected Hannah Lessing, Secretary General of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria.

Sarközi had been a Member of the National Fund’s Board of Trustees since 2000, representing in his role as Chairman of the Cultural Association of Austrian Roma the interests of those persecuted as gypsies (Zigeuner) by the Nazis. In 2010, Sarközi became the Deputy Chairman of the Societal Advisory Board on the renewal of the Austrian exhibition at the former concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. In both of these roles, Sarközi demonstrated his firm commitment to the concerns and interests of the Roma and Sinti community and an ongoing dialogue with the Austrian government sought to emphasize common agendas.



Hannah Lessing and Rudolf Sarközi, 8. April 2015 (c) Franz Johann Morgenbesser cc-by-sa-2.0

A humanitarian focus

Rudolf Sarközi was born in 1944 in the Lackenbach detention camp as the eldest child of Paula Sarközi and Rudolf Weinrich. Following the liberation in 1945 he attended the local school for eight years. In his writing he described how, as a “social outcast (‘gypsy’)”, for a long time he was unable to secure an apprenticeship and had to make a living as an unskilled laborer. In the 1960s Sarközi relocated to Vienna with his wife Helga and son Andreas.

Sarközi was involved in the establishment of the Roma associations in Burgenland and Vienna, successfully campaigned for the official recognition of the Roma and Sinti as an ethnic group in 1993 and was a long-serving Chairman of the Austrian Ethnic Groups Advisory Board, which was set up in 1995. This resulted in the Roma and Sinti gaining “access to the state departments to voice our concerns”, recalled Sarközi in a statement to the National Fund. Following the fatal 1995 pipe bomb attack in Oberwart, the Roma Educational Fund was founded in the same year. In 2008, Sarközi presented his book, “Roma – an Austrian Ethnic Group. From Persecution to Recognition”. Sarközi’s declared objective was to advocate and contribute towards “a better understanding of the Roma and Sinti, that they be encountered without prejudice”.

For the National Fund, established in 1995, Sarközi was not only a vital moral and humanitarian compass in his role as Member of the Board of Trustees, he was also the initiator of a number of projects supported by the National Fund, such as the interview project with surviving eyewitnesses and concentration camp survivors, “Mri Historija & Amari Historija”, and the remembrance plaques for the Burgenland Roma who were murdered under the Nazis. Sarközi also played an active role in memorial site development, in particular at the memorial sites of the former concentration camps Mauthausen and Auschwitz-Birkenau, and supported efforts to come to terms with the persecution of the Roma and Sinti under the Nazis.

On the National Fund’s 20th anniversary, Sarközi declared, “It falls to us, the Holocaust survivors, to teach young people the consequences of hatred and violence. The National Fund can be of great help in terms of educating people and taking steps to prevent negative developments. The continued existence of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria is a must!” Sarközi’s motto: “There are no races, there are just people with different skin-colors and different nationalities”, served to underline his fundamental stance that it was important to keep alive the remembrance of those persecuted by the Nazi regime without the need to categorize them.

Link

Video interview with Rudolf Sarközi, May 2006, Mri Historija: Das Wort "Wiedergutmachung" verwende ich nicht [My Story: I don’t use the word “Wiedergutmachung”]