How does Europe deal with its largest minority? Around 12 million Sinti and Roma of different nationalities live in Europe today. The majority of society tends to be very one-sided in its perception of this minority, and generally excludes it simply as “the other”.

While the European Commission has made cultural diversity part of its programme by declaring it “one of the most important drivers” for “creativity, innovation and prosperity,” the exclusion of the Roma is on the rise in many member states. The Central Council of German Roma and Sinti states that “racism in Europe has become increasingly acceptable, even in the middle of society.” In many countries, laws have been passed to the detriment of the “travelling people” that flagrantly violate the European Convention on Human Rights. The Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights recently reported that antiziganistic (“anti-Gypsy”) stereotypes are now prevalent in a number of European states.

On January 27th, 2011 – International Holocaust Remembrance Day – a representative for Europe’s Roma and Sinti spoke in front of the German parliament, the Bundestag for the very first time. In his speech, Zoni Weisz impressively showed how little imprint the destinies of the more than half a million Roma and Sinti killed during the Nazi era have left in Germany’s collective memory. The condition of the still uncompleted memorial for the murdered Roma and Sinti is a symbolic reminder of this issue.

In spite of – or perhaps because of – its historic predisposition, antiziganism is a reality also in Germany and has been encouraged by a number of reports in the media. These strengthen stereotypes – and this not just within the context of the deportation of refugees from Yugoslavia’s civil wars to its successor states. Although the diversity of lifestyles amongst Roma and Sinti is just as diverse as in other social groups, the image that is communicated through the press remains homogeneous and stereotypical.

What do Roma and Sinti think about their role within European societies? What does their art and literature say about their culture and their identity? A young generation of Roma and Sinti academics, artists, and activists is now conducting a self-confident discourse on emancipation, identity, and difference, which led – among other things – to the organisation of the first Roma pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale. The aim of this symposium is to provide a new platform for this debate, because respect and dialogue are basic elements of democracy. Europe’s democratic validity will not least be measured by the policies it pursues in relation to its minorities.

Can cultural diversity and the transnational history of the Sinti and Roma act as a symbol for a future Europe without borders? To strengthen the rights of the Roma and highlight their contribution to European culture, the Allianz Kulturstiftung and the German Federal Agency for Civic Education have organised this international symposium in cooperation with Literarisches Colloquium Berlin and the project office “Reconsidering Roma.”

An international symposium organised by the Allianz Kulturstiftung and the German Federal Agency for Civic Education in cooperation with Literarisches Colloquium Berlin and the project office “Reconsidering Roma.”
Discussion Panel - part of the DEBATE ON EUROPE series
How Europe Is Dealing With Its Largest Minority

Ever since the end of the Middle Ages, the Roma living in Europe have been both romanticised and persecuted. But most commonly-held beliefs about this “travelling people” are false. What does it mean to be a ‘Gypsy’ in Europe in the year 2011? How can the EU protect its largest minority in light of increasing racism in many of its member states?

Thursday, November 10th

6:00 a.m. Welcome and Opening Statements
Wolfgang Ischinger, Global Head of Government Relations and Public Policy, Allianz SE
Thomas Krüger, President of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education/BBB

Reading Herta Müller, Winner of the 2009 Nobel Prize for Literature

Discussion Panel - part of the DEBATE ON EUROPE series: How Europe Is Dealing With Its Largest Minority

Panelists
Zoltan Balog, Hungarian State Minister for Social Inclusion
Klaus-Michael Bogdals, Professor of Literature at Bielefeld University and author of “Europe erfindet die Zigeuner”
Morten Kjaerum, Director of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Vienna
Herta Müller, Author Nobel Prize for Literature 2009
Silvio Peritore, Head of the Department of Documentation at the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma

Moderation: Marion von Haaren
Deputy Director of the ARD Studio Brüssel

12:00 a.m. Book Presentation: Klaus-Michael Bogdals introduces his new book “Europe erfindet die Zigeuner” (Europe’s invention of the gypsies)
Introduction Thomas Krüger, President of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education/BBB
Matthias of the Südkurier Publishing House plus reception

2:00 p.m. PANEL 2 Roma Art: A Means of Emancipation or a path to a Folklore Ghetto?

Panelists
Daniel Baket, Artist / Curator, GB
Maria Havajová, Curator, NL
Mathias Jud, Artist, CH
Timos Junghaus, Curator, IT
Delaine Le Bas, Artist, GB
Christoph Wachtler, Artist, CH

Moderation: Matthias Rechelt
Journalist / Curator, Berlin

4:00 p.m. PANEL 3 Roma Literature: The Challenge of Writing in Constant Exile

Panelists
Carmen Francesca Banciu, Author, Berlin
Julia Blending, University of Mainz (Literary Studies)
Cécile Kovácsházy, Limoges University (Literary Studies)
Kiba Lumberg, Artist / Author, Helsinki
Stavida Marković, Director / Head of the Roma Aether Klub Theatre, Berlin

Moderation: Simon Penaldi
Manager / Publicist, Berlin

6:00 p.m. Participants depart to vernissage of the exhibition
“Reconsidering Roma - Aspects of Roma and Sinti Life in Contemporary Art” at the Kunsthalle Berlin, Centre for Contemporary Art, Studio I, Mariannenplatz 2, 10997 Berlin / www.reconsidering-roma.de

7:00 p.m. Opening of the exhibition

10:30 a.m. Closing

Thursday, November 11th

10:00 a.m. Welcome
Michael M. Thoss, Managing Director of the Alliance Kulturstiftung Christoph Müller-Hofstede, German Federal Agency for Civic Education/BBB

10:15 a.m. Impulse
Viviane Reding (via video link)
Vice President of the EU Commission and EU Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship
Romani Rose
Chairwoman of the Berlin-Brandenburg Association of Sinti and Roma
Petra Rosenberg
Chairwoman of the Berlin-Brandenburg Association of Sinti and Roma

10:40 a.m. PANEL 1 European and National Strategies: Balance, Perspectives, and Demands

Panelists
Zoltan Balog, Hungarian State Minister for Social Inclusion
Emran Elmazi, Chairman of the Intercultural Youth Organisation of Roma and non-Roma Terno Drom e.V.

Chairwoman of the Berlin-Brandenburg Association of Sinti and Roma

11:00 a.m. Book Presentation: Klaus-Michael Bogdals introduces his new book “Europe erfindet die Zigeuner” (Europe’s invention of the gypsies)
Introduction Thomas Krüger, President of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education/BBB
Matthias of the Südkurier Publishing House plus reception

1:30 p.m. PANEL 2 Roma Art: A Means of Emancipation or a path to a Folklore Ghetto?

Panelists
Daniel Baket, Artist / Curator, GB
Maria Havajová, Curator, NL
Mathias Jud, Artist, CH
Timos Junghaus, Curator, IT
Delaine Le Bas, Artist, GB
Christoph Wachtler, Artist, CH

Moderation: Matthias Rechelt
Journalist / Curator, Berlin

3:00 p.m. PANEL 3 Roma Literature: The Challenge of Writing in Constant Exile

Panelists
Carmen Francesca Banciu, Author, Berlin
Julia Blending, University of Mainz (Literary Studies)
Cécile Kovácsházy, Limoges University (Literary Studies)
Kiba Lumberg, Artist / Author, Helsinki
Stavida Marković, Director / Head of the Roma Aether Klub Theatre, Berlin

Moderation: Simon Penaldi
Manager / Publicist, Berlin

5:00 p.m. Participants depart to vernissage of the exhibition
“Reconsidering Roma - Aspects of Roma and Sinti Life in Contemporary Art” at the Kunsthalle Berlin, Centre for Contemporary Art, Studio I, Mariannenplatz 2, 10997 Berlin / www.reconsidering-roma.de