

The Hungarian society —as our everyday experience proves— is strongly and differentially prejudiced. Representing the situation of the minorities in Hungary with its all social, economic and political aspects would go beyond the scope of this webinar, however with our three distinguished speakers we undertake mapping the causes and consequences of the minorities' neuralgic situation in the Hungarian society. Although this situation was not even shiny before the current COVID-19 pandemic, during the last couple of months public sentiment turned against some minority groups in an even harsher way, which groups have been already marginalized in many aspects. And as part of the fight against the virus, number of measures have been introduced targeting minority groups disproportionately, much more severely or without any reasonable explanation.

Related to the Roma community for example in Slovakia using the army against them was not considered as an overreaction, in Bulgaria the government has set up road blocks and police checkpoints around several Roma neighbourhoods and one of the Bulgarian MEPs hinted that Roma ghettos could turn out to be the real nests of contagion.

Meanwhile in Hungary, we are witnessing further drastic deteriorations in the status of the most disadvantaged and marginalized societal group. Accidentally, just in the middle of the coronavirus outbreak, two major events defined the public discourse on Roma: the Hungarian Supreme Court decided on 3rd instance in one of the most influential (Roma) school segregation case and after a fatal fight between rival groups of young people in Budapest the voices echoing "Gypsy criminality" have been intensified.

The situation of the Hungarian LGBTQI community was also in decline even before the pandemic. As a consequence of the deteriorating situation, there was a dramatic drop in the score Rainbow Europe (2020) assigned to Hungary, losing 8.46 % points in relation to the suspended procedures for legal gender recognition and the lack of proper state protection at public events. In many cases after 2010, the police did not authorize the Budapest Pride March in the city center despite the fact that the event could have been held by the rulings of the court and thus violating the freedom of assembly. In addition, in recent years, an increasingly hostile rhetoric dominated the political speech. But the situation deteriorated with measures adopted under the pretext to fight against the pandemic.

Similarly to the Hungarian case, the pandemic hit Poland at a time where hostilities rose high against the LGBTQI community. It is sufficient to remember the creation of the so-called "LGBT-free zones", where Polish municipalities and regions openly declare their hostility. Several international organisations, local politicians and people protested against such obvious incitement to hatred. EC President Ursula von der Leyen stated in her 2020 State of the European Union speech, that 'LGBTQI-free zones are humanity free zones. And they have no place in our Union.'

And finally, scapegoating during epidemics is nothing new. Historically, xenophobia and racial prejudice have been associated with infectious disease outbreaks, among others Jews. For example, during the medieval plague, pogroms were organized, based on the conspiracy theory that the disease was deliberately spread by Jews through well poisoning. Currently, we are witnessing in parallel with the epidemic control, the stigmatization and humiliation of

certain societal groups by the public and in the political discourse too, blaming them to be responsible for the epidemic.

The Anti-Defamation League already reported several cases from all over the world already in March 2020 where Zionists or Israel were accused of developing or spreading the virus

After this short and generic introduction, during our conversation, we will mostly focus on Hungary occasionally with a regional outlook.

Let me introduce our speakers today in order of the short presentations:

- **Henriett Dinók** is the director of Romaversitas Foundation. She is a lawyer, political scientist and a human rights activist. As a young researcher, she started her career at the Institute for Legal Studies at Hungarian Academy of Sciences, studying criminal and constitutional law in a comparative context. She spent a year conducting her Ph.D. research on hate crimes at the University of Alberta, Canada.

- **Bea Sándor** is the legal program director at Háttér Society. She graduated in 2014 at the Faculty of Law of ELTE University. Earlier she had worked as a literary scholar and translator, and holds a PhD in English literature and an MA in Gender Studies from the Central European University. She has been working as a project coordinator and legal expert for Háttér Society's Legal Program since February 2015. And finally,

- **Anikó Félix** is a sociologist, received her Ph.D. in Sociology from Eötvös Lóránd University. Her main fields of expertise are the contemporary far right movements, subculture and parties with a huge focus on their gender aspect, right-wing populism and antisemitism. Currently, she is the executive director at Goldziher Institute.