

In the UK Parliament: A Shared Experience

I recently had the extraordinary opportunity to visit the UK Parliament, an experience that left a profound impression on me. This unforgettable day was made possible thanks to the kindness and support of Emma Nuttall, Policy Manager at Friends, Families and Travellers, and Nicu Ion, CEO of Roma ACCess Newcastle. I am deeply grateful to them for facilitating this experience. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Mr. John Grady MP, a member of the Scottish Labour Party for Glasgow East, and his Senior Parliamentary Assistant, Mr. Ben McKee, for their warm hospitality and for making this day so meaningful.

A Day Full of Emotions and Learning

The day was filled with emotions and moments of deep reflection. From the moment I arrived at the iconic Palace of Westminster, I felt a sense of awe and privilege. I was warmly welcomed by Mr. John Grady MP and Mr. Ben McKee, who immediately made me feel at ease. To calm my nerves, I began the day with a cup of coffee—a simple yet thoughtful gesture that helped me relax and prepare for the discussions ahead.

Over coffee, I introduced myself to Mr. Grady and Ben. A few days prior, I had sent them a brief overview of my background, but this was an opportunity to share my story in person. I explained that I am of Roma ethnicity and took the time to provide a short overview of Roma history. I spoke about the over 500 years of Roma enslavement, the horrors of the Holocaust, the challenges faced during the communist era, and the ongoing discrimination that persists today. I also shared my work in the UK, particularly my involvement with the Roma Holocaust Memorial Centre in Newcastle Upon Tyne, which aims to preserve and educate others about this often-overlooked part of history.

This conversation was not only an opportunity to share my personal story but also a chance to highlight the struggles and resilience of the Roma community. I then began to ask questions about legislation, policies, and plans that could support the Roma community in the UK. Mr. Grady and Ben listened attentively, and their responses were thoughtful and encouraging.

Exploring the Parliament

After our discussion, Mr. Ben McKee gave me a brief tour of the Parliament. As I walked through the historic halls, I was struck by the grandeur and significance of the building. Every corner seemed to echo with the voices of leaders who had shaped the course of history.

Later, I had the privilege of attending a session in the House of Commons, where Scottish MPs questioned the Prime Minister - KEIR STARMER. The topics ranged from budgetary issues and child harassment to global challenges, including tensions between Trump, Ukraine, and Putin. Watching the Prime Minister respond to these questions was a fascinating experience. The heated debate and the passion of the MPs underscored the importance of parliamentary democracy and its role in addressing both national and international issues.

Lunch and Further Discussions

After the session, I joined Mr. John Grady MP for lunch. This was another opportunity to delve deeper into the questions I had prepared. (I have attached these questions to this document.) Mr. Grady provided detailed and insightful answers. Our conversation covered a

wide range of topics, from education and housing to employment and healthcare for the Roma community. His responses reflected a genuine commitment to addressing the challenges faced by marginalised groups and a desire to advocate for meaningful change.

A Guided Tour by Mr. John Grady MP

After lunch, Mr. John Grady MP personally guided me through the Parliament. He shared fascinating stories about the history of the building and the politicians who had shaped the UK's political landscape. We visited the House of Lords, where the opulent red benches and intricate decor stood in stark contrast to the more subdued green of the Commons. The Royal Gallery, with its stunning paintings and historical significance, was another highlight.

One of the most memorable moments was visiting the House of Lords. Sitting in this historic space, I felt a deep connection to the centuries of debate and decision-making that had taken place there. Mr. Grady's knowledge and passion for history made the tour even more captivating and enlightening.

Reflections on the Day

As the day came to an end, I reflected on the significance of this experience. Being in the UK Parliament was not just about witnessing the workings of democracy; it was about feeling seen and heard as a member of the Roma community. The kindness and openness of Mr. John Grady MP and Mr. Ben McKee left a lasting impression on me.

This visit reinforced my belief in the power of dialogue and representation. It reminded me that, although the challenges faced by the Roma community are significant, there are people in positions of influence who are willing to listen and advocate for change. I left the Parliament with a renewed sense of hope and determination to continue my work in promoting Roma rights and preserving our history.

Gratitude

Once again, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to **Emma Nuttall**, Policy Manager at Friends, Families and Travellers, **Nicu Ion**, CEO of Roma ACCESS Newcastle, Mr. **John Grady MP**, and Mr. **Ben McKee** for making this day possible. Their support and generosity have inspired me to continue my efforts to support the Roma community and work towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

This experience will remain etched in my memory as a reminder of the importance of perseverance, dialogue, and the enduring power of democracy.

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