

# Roma: A European Minority

## The Challenge of Diversity

Edited by  
Monika Flašíková-Beňová,  
Hannes Swoboda and  
Jan Marinus Wiersma



Group of the Progressive Alliance of  
**Socialists & Democrats**  
in the European Parliament

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The contributions in this publication  
do not represent the official position  
of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists  
and Democrats in the European Parliament

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# Preface: Human Dignity is Non-Negotiable



**Martin Schulz**

Recently I met Nobel Prize Laureate and writer Günter Grass to discuss the situation of the Roma and Sinti in Europe. Supporting the Roma in their struggle has for years been an almost daily task of the Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. To improve their situation, the Roma also need the support of civil society. It was heartening to see both the commitment of this famous writer and the work his Roma foundation is accomplishing.

Human dignity is non-negotiable within the European Union. This was my first thought when I saw how the Roma community was treated by the Italian government in 2007. Three years later, the pictures of the destruction of Roma camps and the expulsions from France deeply shocked me. I welcomed the decision of the European Commission to exercise its powers as guardian of EU law – this time not in relation to the internal market but based on a fundamental principle of EU citizenship. It is, after all, about defending and enforcing core values of the EU.

The integration of the Roma into our societies must be a priority for all member states and the European Union. Those who are confronted with these problems on a daily basis, like local mayors, need our support. Our societies must be willing to integrate the Roma and they themselves must be more engaged in this process, of course with full respect for their cultural identity.

The events in Italy and France have led to an increased awareness that the EU must tackle the Roma issue. Indeed, it is now

frequently discussed in Council meetings and the European Commission is preparing an EU Framework for National Integration Strategies. The S&D Group has led demands for a European solution for years and we will continue to keep the Roma issue on the European agenda. For my group it is of great importance to have close contact with the Roma community and support their grassroots movements. We will continue to speak with Roma people, listen to their worries and greatly value their input in developing ideas for Roma integration. This book is a contribution to this debate.

# Introduction



**Monika Flašíková-Beňová**  
**Hannes Swoboda**

“The Gypsy problem is a litmus test not of democracy but of a civil society,” Václav Havel said in 1993. “The two are certainly two sides of the same coin; one is unthinkable without the other. One means legislation to enable the people to vote and make them the source of power. The civil society is related to human behaviour.” The enlargements of 2004 and 2007 brought between five and six million people of Roma origin into the European Union. Protecting their rights and addressing their social and economic problems consequently became a European issue and even a test case of the European Union’s values. What Havel had in mind almost twenty years ago was a society in which people would act as responsible citizens and manifestations of intolerance would be driven out.

While a large part of the Roma population was employed during communism, mainly as unskilled industrial workers, the fall of the communist system caused the elimination of their jobs when radical pro-market policies were introduced. At the same time, there were, was, and remains a widespread manifestation of intolerance and outspoken discrimination against this ethnic minority group – with the complicity of many politicians.

After the violent attacks on Roma originating from new member states in Italy in the autumn of 2007 and the expulsion of Roma from France in August 2010, the issue of their inclusion gained considerable political momentum and caused for the first time public debate all-over Europe. It created anger in the new member states who often had been lectured to do more for the

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Roma. A typical reaction from the region of origin is the following quote in the Romanian paper *Adevărul*: “Until recently, Westerners would lecture us on how to treat Gypsies – whether it was a matter of terminology (say Roma, not Gypsy!) or legislation. But now that they, too, got invaded, they melodramatically changed their tune, taking drastic steps that Bucharest, Bratislava, Budapest, Sofia, Zagreb and Belgrade would not have dared to take. Is this sheer hypocrisy? At any rate, the West has now taught us quite a lesson!” This recent episode makes clear that much more should be done, both at the European and national level, to break the vicious circle of poverty, exclusion and discrimination. Poverty does not stop at borders. And above all, it has shown that it is not just an “Eastern European issue”, but a challenge for all countries in the EU.

When speaking about Roma, one has to bear in mind the large diversity of this people. Roma also live, and have lived, in significant numbers in countries like France and Spain, where their situation is considerably better but not without problems. Nevertheless, what many Roma in Central and Eastern Europe have in common are appalling living circumstances. Members of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D Group) make regular visits to Roma areas. Most Roma we meet are either living on the outskirts of villages or in urban shanty towns. Forced evictions occur on a regular basis, forcing these families to constantly move from one place to another. While Roma admit that they have problems, too often the majority population, including their elected representatives, consider *them* the problem.

The S&D Group in the European Parliament has committed itself to support this transnational European minority, which faces continuing discrimination and severe social and economic exclusion. Already many years ago, while accession talks were ongoing with many post-communist countries, we urged the European Commission to come forward with a comprehensive EU Roma Strategy to break the vicious circle of poor housing, poor health, low or no access to education, and unemployment. Furthermore,

we expressed the need for a Commissioner who would be responsible for coordinating Roma policy from Brussels.

While at EU level policymakers have the tendency solely to point out the responsibilities of member states to improve the situation of their Roma citizens, national governments all too often “Europeanise” the issue as an excuse not to act more vigorously themselves. Populist politicians in the East are glad to get rid of the “gypsies” and to shove the burden to the so-called old member states. The latter, conversely, apply the method of “return to sender”; the fundamental right of free movement of persons in the EU applies to a lesser extent to the Roma.

We believe that EU institutions, national, regional, local governments, and not to forget the Roma communities themselves, all share the responsibility to promote the inclusion of Roma and uphold their fundamental rights as European citizens. It is urgently needed that all step up their efforts to achieve tangible results in this area. Roma are never “just Roma”, they are the citizens of a national state and members of a community. It is first and foremost the responsibility of the city councils and national governments to provide adequate services to all citizens – without making a distinction based on ethnicity. The same applies for host-countries of Roma from new member states; no difference can be made between the Romanian doctors coming to France to work or the Romanian Roma who are seeking a better future for themselves and their children. A truly European challenge is to reduce drastically the differences of income between East and West, but also within regions in a country. Until that problem is resolved, poverty will travel – much to the dislike of the general public in Western Europe.

Whereas national governments and local administrations are the key players when it comes to shaping effective policies, the EU should claim a leading role coordinating existing instruments and the exchange of best practices. Therefore, while member states should reaffirm their commitment to equal treatment in both word and practice, the European Union should take up its responsibility to monitor and benchmark progress. And it should make

sure that the already existing anti-discrimination legislation is being fully implemented.

Although concrete initiatives to improve access to housing, health care, education, and the labour market are key elements, Roma exclusion also has a significant cultural dimension. Roma communities themselves should be encouraged to take up the challenge of constructively defining themselves vis à vis society. The internal (cultural, social and political) dynamics of Roma communities should receive clear attention if we want to develop effective policies. But sensitivity to cultural differences should not override commitments to equal rights, equal treatment, equal access, and equal opportunities. Too often cultural differences have been used as an excuse to ghettoize and segregate rather than herald some benign celebration of diversity.

Another abiding challenge to Roma inclusion is anti-Gypsyism. This must be recognised for what it is: a distinct and long-established kind of racism. The discrimination Roma face has not changed much over the years, and in a number of cases, has even significantly increased among majority populations and authorities. Hand in hand with the political discourse of Romaphobia in some member states, there have been several incidents of racially motivated violence against Roma.

The integration of Roma also implies that Roma become active citizens. If we analyse how the Roma are represented in the representative political bodies the result shows a clear under-representation. Many potential Roma voters are excluded from the electoral process because of a lack of identity documents or of low levels of education. It is a major task of in particular political parties to change this.

So far, we have basically failed the litmus test Havel was referring to almost two decades ago. The recent – and still on-going – expulsions from France had at least one positive result: the problems Roma are facing are now high on the political agenda. There is a window of opportunity to put our efforts together and improve the lives of the so-called “poorest of the poor”. The

Hungarian government has announced to give priority to the Roma question during their EU Presidency. Moreover, the Commission is expected to propose in April an EU framework of National Roma Integration Strategies.

We hope that this publication will add to the debate. The authors are from various backgrounds and have different expertises, but the thing they have in common is that they all want to contribute to finding workable solutions, and for that we are very grateful to them. We would also like to thank those people without who this publication had not been possible: Herwig Kaiser for overseeing the activities, Ute Surinx for her help with translations, Laura Pearson for proof-reading the articles, Dimitri Culot for doing the lay-out of the publication, Rachel Titiriga for courteously providing the cover picture, Jan Marinus Wiersma as co-editor, and Kati Piri who was responsible at staff level for the overall coordination of the publication.

The pictures printed in this book were taken during working visits of the S&D Group.



# The Point of No Return



Jan Marinus Wiersma

*Existing in the teeth of a civilization which disapproves of them, they are a heartening reminder of the largeness of the earth and the power of human obstinacy.*

George Orwell, 1938<sup>1</sup>

The famous writer George Orwell was a Günter Wallraff “*avant la lettre*”. He liked to go undercover to visit the mines in England or to accompany tramps while doing harvest work. That is how he met with Roma or “travellers” as they are called in the UK. He was neither the first nor the last author to be intrigued by the Roma people and their culture. His description of the Roma is somewhat outdated, but – as Günter Grass – he was a man who engaged politically and described himself openly as a convinced socialist. It is not surprising that the cultural background and social circumstances of the Roma and Sinti have attracted the attention of engaged artists. In an interview that follows, Nobel Prize Laureate Grass praises the cultural cohesion that Roma and Sinti have shown through the centuries; he considers them to be true Europeans because borders have not been an obstacle in maintaining their culture. The German author stays far away from a romantic interpretation of their way of life. He draws attention to their sufferings under the Nazi regime and the lack of recognition afterwards; Grass wants to end their isolation by promoting the official use of their written language in schools. Orwell worked with Roma in the fields; Grass first met Roma and Sinti in the studio of his art teacher Otto Pankok; I had a shock when as rapporteur for the accession of Slovakia to the EU,

<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, *Collected Essays*, London 2002

I visited the Roma quarter of Košice, in 1998, and was confronted with the extreme poverty. Although I know many others who have had the same kind of experience, have we been able to act upon it and fill the policy vacuum that Günter Grass noticed after his speech on the Roma to the Council of Europe in 2000?

Great Britain, Germany and Slovakia are countries already mentioned above, but Roma live almost everywhere in Europe. For a long time they were considered – in some countries – to be part of the folklore and in others – behind the Iron Curtain – they lived an anonymous life. This changed when the Berlin Wall came down. The Roma became much more visible due to the open borders that allowed many to witness their situation, which led to a certain preoccupation with the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe; partly out of concern with their deteriorating circumstances and partly due to fears of mass migration to the richer EU countries. This publication has the same emphasis (or bias if you wish) though there are also contributions from Spain, Italy and The Netherlands. In these countries, as in France, the situation of the Roma and Sinti is different, although not unproblematic. Isidro Rodriguez from the Fundación Secretariado Gitano describes the relative success of the social and economic integration of Roma in Spain; they profited from the general welfare increase in his country. Social integration and equal access to opportunities are key factors, he underlines. Nevertheless, Roma profited less from the general improvement of living standards than the average population did. This is why the, soon to be published, EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies addresses all EU member states. President Boris Tadić of the Republic of Serbia rightly claims, that the (potential) candidate countries should be allowed to participate in EU policies.

The Council of Europe was the first European institution to address the dire situation of many Roma and Sinti in Western and Eastern Europe – basically from the anti-discrimination angle. The EU stepped in when membership negotiations started to get under way with the new democracies that wanted to join



*Temporary housing. France, 2011*

the EU. The Roma issue was high on the agenda of the European Parliament and a regular topic in the debates about the progress of the negotiations. The candidate countries officially did their best to meet the demands of the EU to do better. I remember a report of the EU embassy in Bratislava mentioning that the previous day the Slovak government had adopted a Roma strategy, “at the request of Mr. Wiersma”. I should feel honoured but I do not, because why should they do it for me? With hindsight, many of the commitments made then turned out to be empty promises. After EU accession, governments lost interest in the Roma; other priorities dominated the political battles in these countries. The structures put in place to deal with the problems of the Roma turned out to be weak and without sufficient political weight. Politicians, in a climate of rising populist nationalism, were not keen to be seen as favouring the Roma.<sup>2</sup>

Ivan Krastev describes in his article how the Roma have fallen victim to a new phenomenon: the rise of the threatened majorities who feel betrayed by their elites. In his view, the real problem is the erosion and de-legitimation of the liberal pro-minority consensus and the emergence of a new one which expresses

<sup>2</sup> See: Hannes Swoboda and Jan Marinus Wiersma, *Democracy, Populism and Minority Rights*, Brussels 2008



the fears and delusions of the threatened majorities. Since the commitments made before accession were not really binding, Brussels could officially not intervene due to the lack of a legal basis – minorities are considered to be the responsibility of the member states. Only after serious incidents of bad treatment of Roma immigrants in Italy and France did the EU start to take some real action. How the role of the EU in relation to the member states will develop, time will tell. The European Commission can act if there is an infringement of EU laws as it did in the case of the extraditions of Roma from France. Furthermore, it can promote a more targeted use of EU funds and monitor the results of inclusion policies. Overall, Brussels remains hesitant to point out to the capitals their responsibilities and the Commission says that the future framework for inclusion strategies should be supportive of the national authorities. I fully agree with George Soros, President of the Open Society Foundations, who insists that national governments should not be let off the hook – they decide about essential policies concerning housing, education or health, and they must not be allowed to use Europe as an alibi for inaction.

There is no evidence that strong, proportionate and specific measures are in place to tackle the social and economic problems of the Roma community. This is one of the conclusions of a recent report of the EU Roma Taskforce as quoted by Commissioner Reding in her contribution. EU funds are often not fully used or are not used in an effective way, she states. After spending considerable sums of money on Roma projects and having produced tons of reports since 1989, Europe has still not been able to “fix” the Roma problem – a term used by the Romanian Roma activist Valeriu Nicolae. He insists that the Roma are not the problem but they are the ones having problems, and that just throwing money at them is not the solution. Europe has failed to really address anti-gypsyism and grassroots empowerment, he continues. Nicolae blames the public and policymakers alike for seeing the Roma as the deviation, and not their discrimination. I agree that the Roma cannot be “fixed” and that an ad hoc approach does not work. The discrimination of Roma remains an important obstacle to their integration. Like

Nicolae, Lili Makaveeva from Integro Association in Bulgaria, emphasises the need to involve Roma more in policy making and to help them become active citizens who can fend for themselves. Civic activity would provide them with a sense of dignity and ownership. Gábor Daróczy from Hungary underlines the importance of educating young Roma in such numbers that they can become a critical mass for change. But for that to happen, they have to be taken more seriously, to be accepted, their cultural inheritance respected – shaping policies with them and not for them as EU-Commissioner László Andor rightly states in his contribution. This will not be an easy task. Mutual suspicions, past superstitions and distrust will have to be overcome. Societies will have to change their attitudes and the Roma community will have to open up. Its passivity and self isolation has historical grounds, but as long as the invisible walls of its own language and an inward looking culture remain, it will be hard to improve the situation of the Roma. There is another side to this coin; instead of seeing the Roma as a threat; they should be awarded for their rich cultural contribution, as Günter Grass demands. Seeing the Roma in a different light may be the biggest challenge. Stop wanting them to be like us, Nazzareno Guarnieri, president of the Italian Federazione Romani, advises us, and accept that the Roma will not assimilate but aim for integration while respecting important parts of the Roma heritage. He demands a critical confrontation of cultures for the purpose of their re-examination.

Is it all negative? Yes and no. The extreme exclusion of many Roma in parts of Central and Eastern Europe persists and in many places the situation has got worse since 1989. But slowly we are learning and the issue is on the European agenda to stay – we have reached a point of no return. We have a better picture of what does, and what does not, work. Many articles in this publication testify to that. A study carried out on behalf of the European Commission identified several factors that determine the effectiveness of inclusion policies – effective coordination, sustainable programmes, participation and consultation of Roma, reliable data and evaluation of results.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> EC Press Release, 21 December 2010.

There are many complaints – also in some of the articles – about the financial mechanisms of the European Union Funds. Tendering procedures are very complicated, member states do not target the money properly, they lack the knowledge and administrative capacity to use them adequately, local authorities prefer to invest in prestige projects, opportunities of cross-funding from different funds are being overlooked, payments are late, and money gets lost because of co-financing rules. And above all, Roma are not involved enough which is why many projects fail. The European Commission is aware of this – read Andor’s remarks – but quick action is needed to restore some kind of order. I hope I will never again have to witness the kind of stupidity I saw in a Romanian Roma village where good money was spent to build a sewer, while nobody had any idea how to supply the houses with running water. This is an example of a bad practice from which we can learn just as much as from the by now famous “best practices” that the EU likes so much. It is positive that the European Commission is paying much more attention to what works and what does not and wants to hold the member states more accountable for the results of their inclusion efforts, applying stricter monitoring and demanding more effective evaluations – “a more robust approach” in the words of Commissioner Andor.

MEPs Kinga Göncz (Hungary) and Claude Moraes (UK) demand a comprehensive action plan with clear targets and steps to be taken. I can only subscribe to this, but would like to add a suggestion made by a Hungarian expert that local municipalities should only be able to access the funds if they also direct investments to the poorer areas. It would be unacceptable, if with help of EU money, the gap between the Roma and the rest would become bigger. The EU should, as Eva Sobotka of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights proposes, define indicators for Roma inclusion focusing on achieving “community cohesion” and better life chances. What we need is an engagement with the wider community, Roma and non-Roma, to illustrate the benefits of inclusive communities with Roma as equal members of society – thus creating positive visibility.

There are many references in this publication to what is called “mainstreaming” – let the Roma profit from overall policies to tackle poverty. Roma might consider it to be an attempt at assimilation, but as a policy to address the social problems of the Roma, it does have certain advantages. It is not always to the benefit of the Roma when they are singled out by policy-makers to be given extra assistance. Other locals might feel slighted. But by targeting poverty in general, one automatically targets the Roma as well. There is a lack of hard statistical facts about the living conditions of the Roma: gathering information based on ethnic background raises many legal issues and a lot of Roma in the critical areas anyhow refuse to identify themselves as such. In countries that take part in the Roma Decade censuses will be held to get a better picture of the circumstances of the Roma. It will be done carefully, as President Tadić of the Republic of Serbia tells us. A trial done in his country shows that approximately only 25% of those interviewed (by Roma interviewers) declare themselves to be Roma. Gathering more and better information to support evidence-based policies is important, however, it should not become an excuse not to act. We know where and how the Roma live and we should, therefore, concentrate on the question of how available contextual information can be translated into multidimensional solutions. Mainstreaming is attractive because it allows us to target specific areas with high unemployment and bad social conditions and to reach the Roma, who mainly live in these areas but not exclusively, without singling them out. This kind of targeting is much more acceptable to the whole of society and fits in with the growth-initiatives in the EU like Europe 2020 that aims to lift 20 million people out of poverty. A big opportunity according to George Soros, because Roma children are the potential workforce of the future.

Nobody can deny that most of the problems demand local solutions and active engagement of local politicians and local Roma communities. Where Roma find the way to express their needs and succeed in occupying local council seats, successful partnerships appear. But always in the form of a two way

street: give and take. As citizens, Roma are entitled to enjoy their rights but modern society also makes demands. And as the example of the Dutch town of Nieuwegein tells us, this is not always easy. Mayor Cor de Vos was able, only after years of unsuccessful attempts, to find a workable method to deal with the Roma in his municipality – we will help you but only if you help us. Some find his policy of setting limits while offering perspectives too harsh, but it is a reflection of the debate in the Netherlands on the rights and duties of minority members of society.

The participation of Roma in civic society and in political life is an important theme. It is one of the ten basic principles on which the EU Roma approach is based.<sup>4</sup> There are positive examples – take the Slovenian town of Murska Sobota as described by MEP Tanja Fajon. In practice however, it has been difficult to develop a sustainable Roma civil society. Although there are many grassroots organisations and they do a lot of good work, they are often not well appreciated by local and national authorities who have little money to spend on them. EU financial support in many cases helps out, but the type of funding makes these organisations vulnerable as both Lili Makaveeva and Gábor Daróczi argue. Financial support is project based and short term. Moreover, there is the danger of NGOs listening better to their donors than to their clients. To set up a community instrument with more direct and long term funding of Roma NGOs could offer a way around this. Until now the European Commission does not seem to be keen to do this nor to increase its direct financial contribution. It says that the member states should do more in this area.

Last year, I was invited to join a fact-finding mission of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Romania about which Catherine Messina Pajic reports. We tried to understand what efforts were being made in that country to give Roma a greater

<sup>4</sup> These are: 1. Constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies. 2. Explicit but not exclusive targeting. 3. Intercultural approach. 4. Aiming for the mainstream. 5. Awareness of the gender dimension. 6. Transfer of evidence-based policies. 7. Use of Community instruments. 8. Involvement of regional and local authorities. 9. Involvement of civil society. 10. Active participation of the Roma.

role in political life. Our findings were not very positive, to say the least. As Messina Pajic describes it, with a critical view from the other side of the Atlantic, the situation in Romania – and probably in other countries too – is raising many questions. Most political parties are only interested in getting the Roma vote out when there are elections and we heard many stories of vote buying. On the other hand, some Roma leaders are eager to sell. This is certainly not the way to create confidence in democratic traditions with the Roma vote being viewed solely as a means to get power (instead of as an end of politics), and elections as an opportunity to make some money. Immanuel Kant would turn in his grave if he knew. Social democrats should be concerned and act rigorously to change this lamentable state of affairs.

Martin Kovats of the University of London has studied Roma activism for two decades and shows himself to be optimistic. He writes about the historical emergence of Roma people as active agents. Roma are forced to become political in order to secure the necessities of modern life and, he continues, this is a great opportunity to end their isolation. But if progressive political forces fail to grasp it, reactionary ones will.

The then European Commissioner for Enlargement Günter Verheugen once said, referring to the Roma, that the long run also starts with a first step. The fact that it might take a generation to close the gap between the Roma and the societies, in which they live, should not discourage us from starting to work.



# The Debate





# A Blind Spot in the Consciousness of Europe



## Interview with Günter Grass

Hannes Swoboda and Jan Marinus Wiersma

On a rainy day in early February 2011 we arrived in the village of Beidendorf, near Lübeck, to visit Günter Grass (1927), winner of the 1999 Nobel Prize for Literature. Our taxi from Hamburg was very late and we were somewhat nervous about that. However, the writer showed understanding and was not in a hurry – he even took the time to show us around in the old stable that he has turned into his study and atelier. We did not come to talk with him about his books, but about his views on the issue of the Roma and the Sinti. In 1997, Günter Grass established the Foundation for the Roma People<sup>1</sup> with the aim to support innovative projects and stimulate awareness of and interest in the situation of this community. The Foundation provides direct grants and hands out the Pankok Prize, which has already been awarded to filmmakers, Roma human rights activists and mediators that assist Roma children at school.

Mr. Grass has made many public statements about the Roma and the Sinti in which he highlighted his special concerns.<sup>2</sup> In his speech on the occasion of the launch of his foundation, he remembered the audience of the fact that when it came to the establishment of the Holocaust memorial in Berlin the Roma and Sinti were on the “waiting list”. Another recurrent theme is the Romani language issue. Addressing the Council of Europe in 2000 he pointed out that this language hardly existed in written form. The language is spoken in many countries but lacks

<sup>1</sup> Stiftung zugunsten des Romavolks. c/o Sekretariat Günter Grass, Glockengiesserstrasse 21, 23552 Lübeck.

<sup>2</sup> See: Ohne Stimme, Reden zugunsten des Volkes der Roma und Sinti, Steidl Verlag, Göttingen 2000.

expression to the outside world. It actually offers protection. Grass: "It is the secret language of the discriminated and the persecuted." But in his speech he called for change. He pledges that Europe should help turn the Romani language into one that can and will be taught at schools. He once said about the Roma and Sinti that they are a blind spot in the consciousness of Europe. He still works hard to make this spot disappear.

The interview took place in German. In honor of the language that means so much to Mr. Grass, we publish both the German and English versions.

*Mr. Grass, you are known as a politically engaged author and artist. Where does your engagement come from?*

At the end of the war I was seventeen. I had to question myself how it had been possible that as a young person I was enthusiastic about the Nazi ideology and that I had believed until the end in the final victory. I also wondered why the Weimar Republic had ended in ruins. There were many reasons. But the main one was the lack of support of many citizens of this weak democracy – authors included. This awareness was for me the motive to become politically engaged at a relative early age. The basis for that were my social democratic inclinations. To use the word conviction would be too strong.

*When did you become aware for the first time of the situation of the Roma and the Sinti?*

I was nineteen and a student at the arts academy of Düsseldorf. One of my teachers was Otto Pankok, and in his atelier – and also in those of the students – Sinti came and went. They were part of the big Pankok family. As a child, I was confronted with minority questions: my father came from a German family, my mother was Kasubian. The Kasubians are a Slavic minority, an old Slavic tribe. Also for that reason I decided to establish the Foundation for the Roma People. It awards, in memory of my teacher, the Otto-Pankok prize.

*What explains in your view the difficulties that the Roma and Sinti seem to have to represent their interests? Why has there been less attention to their fate under the Nazi regime than to that of the Jews?*

When we start from the terrible consequences of the widespread persecution of the Nazi-regime it is well known what happened to the Jews and those that survived, and their kin often have a high level of education and have people everywhere that can represent their interests. As one says today: they form a lobby. The Roma and the Sinti were also persecuted. They are today the largest minority of Europe. Their number is estimated between 12 and 15 million. I gave a speech in Strasbourg to members of the Council of Europe – the hall was full and I got a lot of applause but nothing happened afterwards. It was as if I had spoken in a vacuum. One of the problems they may have is that Roma and Sinti, who have a higher education, often hide their identity. They have to count on difficulties when they disclose the fact that they are of the Roma and Sinti family. In Lübeck Moisling there are some Roma and Sinti families. They are aloof and when we invite them to events they seldom attend. One notices their fear to make themselves known. The only security they have is the family circle. This also explains their resistance to develop their language, the Romanesko, in written form.

*Why was there in Germany always more debate about the persecution of the Jews and much less about what happened to the Roma and the Sinti?*

We have had a discussion about the Holocaust memorial in Berlin that lasted for years. To set up a Holocaust memorial only for the Jews of course led to the immediate reaction of the Sinti and the Roma: “We also want a memorial”. I think it is wrong when the same selection is made as applied by the Nazis. This separation of victims lasts until today.

It does not happen very often that Jewish organisations openly speak in favour of the Roma and the Sinti although they shared

the same fate in Auschwitz. I believe that the fate of the Roma and the Sinti is much less known about than the crimes committed against the Jews. There is hardly any solidarity from the Jewish side when Roma and Sinti are discriminated against or persecuted. I would wish this was the case.

### *Were the fates of the Jews and of the Roma and Sinti identical?*

We can only estimate the number, many more than one million Roma and Sinti were annihilated. But that is not the point. For me the decisive issue is the will to destroy, which was practiced in different ways. Many Sinti were sterilized, many killed in the gas chambers. Melanie Spitta, who was awarded the Otto-Pankok prize, talked in one of her films with elderly people who survived Auschwitz and would have liked to have children but had been sterilized.

### *Why do European societies find it hard to accept the Roma and Sinti amongst their midst?*

This is not only a problem that concerns the Roma and Sinti. People who come here – whether Turkish or of other origin – are expected to forget where they came from and to adapt themselves. I do not know whether this is right. It seems that a large part of our population is not capable to accept that this diversity makes us richer. The big minority of the Roma – in Europe far more than 10 million – is one that never demanded its own state. They are not separatists and are as a matter of fact born Europeans. They have no hesitations in crossing borders. In the US – where one criticises many things – the citizens are proud of the origins of their ancestors. Irish, that immigrated, Polish, Chinese, Jews, they all are able to cherish the remnants of their original culture. It helps them. Why not allow the same to the Roma and Sinti? One talks a lot about the threat of separate cultures – slogans that are testimonies of intolerance.

*What do you consider to be the original cultural contribution of the Roma and the Sinti?*

We all know for what we can thank the Roma, whether in Spain or in Hungary – let us only take music. The piano player Schiff recently said in an interview that Béla Bartók was attacked during the 1940s in Hungary because he had dared, as Hungarian composer, to use Romanian folksongs for some of his compositions. This was part of the reason why he emigrated to the US. This is an attitude, that still seems to be present in Hungary, a kind of narrow nationalism without understanding of a group that is not linked to a nation. What rather astonishes me is that although the Roma have no state, they show an enormous understanding of one another; a cultural cohesion. This is a very big cultural achievement of the Roma and Sinti.

*But is it not their problem that they are seen to be too independent?*

That is possible, but something to admire. What others have – state organisations and so on – they do not have and still they have a cohesion. Why does that irritate others? Maybe it is fear, linked to superstition, maybe it is jealousy because these people, who own little, move with a certain pride and self-consciousness and insist on their authenticity.

*Those with political responsibility for the Roma issues sometimes complain that it is difficult to communicate with the Roma and the Sinti.*

Many Roma and Sinti are cautious towards strangers and they have good reasons to be distrustful. But what is not difficult when one enters the political field? Why should it be simple with regard to the Roma and Sinti? I do not see that. Take an example: Here in the northern German federal state Schleswig-Holstein the constitution – wisely – contains a protection of minorities, that applies to the Danes and the Frisians. The board of the

Foundation, that my wife and I established, made as one of its first initiatives an appeal to include in the constitution of our federal state the Roma and Sinti as a minority. There was no majority for this. The Danish and Frisians had nothing against this. One argument was that Sinti live in more federal states while the Danes and the Frisians only form a minority in Schleswig-Holstein. Actually, it was more of a European problem. This they like to do: What they cannot regulate at home, has to be arranged in Europe.

*In the recent past you have protested strongly against the forced return of Roma to Kosovo from where they had fled during the Balkan wars. Why?*

We protested against the conditions that most Roma could expect in the case of such a return. Additionally, many are here for several years since the outbreak of the violent conflict in the Balkans. Their children have often only learned to speak German. They do not speak the language of the country to which they are to be extradited. One could only start to discuss a return when acceptable circumstances have been created. But also then one could ask whether it would make sense to send children and young people – who have grown up here or in other European states against their will to a country that is strange to them.

*How does the rise of nationalism and the radical right influence the political environment of the Roma and Sinti?*

Certainly, we might talk now about Hungary but abuses have existed in Italy for some time and we were amazed and angry about the extraditions from France. It is perhaps better in Germany, we are as before “burned children”.

*What could Europe do to help improve the situation of the Roma and the Sinti?*

It would help to recognise the Roma as a European minority and a few of them should sit in the European Parliament to represent their interests. One of the big problems that we discussed in the beginning is our school and education system, where the history of the Roma and Sinti and their particular customs are almost ignored. Here a European initiative could help. As far as I know, the Karls University in Prague has a chair for the Roma language. I welcome that very much.





# Ein blinder Fleck im europäischen Bewusstsein

## Ein Interview mit Günter Grass

*Herr Grass, Sie sind als politisch engagierter Autor und Künstler bekannt. Woher kommt Ihr Engagement?*

Am Ende des Krieges war ich siebzehn. Ich musste mich fragen, wie es möglich gewesen war, dass ich als junger Mensch von der Naziideologie begeistert gewesen war und bis zuletzt an den Endsieg geglaubt hatte. Ich fragte mich auch, warum die Weimarer Republik untergegangen war. Dafür gab es viele Ursachen. Aber der Hauptgrund war, dass viele Bürger – Autoren eingeschlossen – diese schwache Demokratie nicht unterstützt hatten. Dieses Bewusstsein war für mich das Motiv, mich in relativ jungen Jahren politisch zu engagieren. Grundlage dafür waren meine sozialdemokratischen Neigungen. Das Wort Überzeugung zu benutzen, wäre zu stark.

*Wann wurden Sie sich zum ersten Mal der Situation der Roma und Sinti bewußt?*

Damals war ich 19 Jahre alt und Student auf der Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf. Einer meiner Lehrer war Otto Pankok, und in seinen Ateliers – aber auch den Ateliers der Schüler – gingen Sinti ein und aus. Sie gehörten zur großen Pankokfamilie. Es kommt hinzu, dass ich als Kind mit Minderheitsfragen konfrontiert gewesen bin – mein Vater kam aus einer deutschen Familie, meine Mutter war Kaschubin. Die Kaschuben sind eine slawische Minderheit, ein alter slawischer Stamm. Auch deshalb entschloß ich mich, die „Stiftung zugunsten des Romavolks“ zu gründen. Sie vergibt, in Erinnerung an meinen Lehrer, den Otto-Pankok-Preis.

*Was erklärt Ihrer Ansicht nach die Schwierigkeiten, die Roma und Sinti damit zu haben scheinen, ihre Interessen zu vertreten? Warum wurde ihrem Schicksal unter der Naziherrschaft weniger Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt als jenem der Juden?*

Wenn ich einmal von der großen Verfolgung, den schrecklichen Konsequenzen ausgehe: Es ist weitgehend bekannt, was mit den Juden geschehen ist. Die überlebenden Juden, die nachgewachsenen, sind zumeist von einem hohen Bildungsniveau und haben, wo man auch hinkommt, Menschen, die ihre Sache vertreten - eine Lobby, wie man heute sagt.

Die Verfolgung galt auch den Sinti und Roma. Sie sind heute die größte Minderheit in Europa, man schätzt sie auf zwischen 12 und 15 Millionen. Ich habe in Straßburg vor Mitgliedern des Europarates eine Rede gehalten. Der Saal war voll, es gab Beifall - später war keine Reaktion spürbar. Ich habe wie ins Leere gesprochen.

Eines der Probleme mag sein, daß Roma und Sinti, die über das Abitur bis zum Studium gekommen sind, ihre Herkunft nicht selten geheim halten. Sie müssen mit Schwierigkeiten rechnen, wenn sie bekannt machen, dass sie aus einer Sinti- oder Romafamilie stammen. In Lübeck Moisling leben einige Sinti- und Romafamilien. Sie sind sehr scheu; wenn wir Ihnen Einladungen zu Veranstaltungen schicken, kommen sie selten. Die Angst, sich zu erkennen zu geben, ist spürbar. Nur der Familienverbund bietet ihnen Sicherheit. So erklärt sich auch der Widerstand, ihre Sprache, das Romanes, zu verschriftlichen.

*Warum gab es in Deutschland immer eine grössere Debatte über die Judenverfolgung und nur in viel geringerem Ausmaß über das, was mit den Roma und Sinti geschah?*

Wir haben über das Holocaustdenkmal in Berlin eine jahrelange Diskussion gehabt. Ein Holocaustdenkmal allein für die Juden führte prompt zur Reaktion der Sinti und Roma. "Wir wollen auch ein Denkmal haben". Ich halte es für falsch, wenn man ebenso selektiert, wie es die Nazis getan haben. Die Separierung der Opfer hält bis heute an. Es kommt selten vor, dass jüdische

Verbände sich in der Öffentlichkeit zugunsten der Sinti und Roma aussprechen, obwohl sie in Auschwitz genau das gleiche Schicksal haben erleiden müssen. Ich glaube, dass das Schicksal der Roma- und Sinti in der Bevölkerung bei weitem nicht so bekannt ist wie die Verbrechen gegen Juden. Eine Solidarisierung von jüdischer Seite, wenn Roma oder Sinti heutzutage diskriminiert oder verfolgt werden, gibt es kaum. Ich würde sie mir wünschen.

### *Waren die Schicksale der Juden und der Roma und Sinti identisch?*

Man kann die Zahl nur schätzen, es sind weit über eine Million Sinti und Roma vernichtet worden. Aber ein Größenverhältnis sollte kein Maßstab sein. Entscheidend ist für mich der Vernichtungswille, der auf verschiedene Art und Weise umgesetzt wurde. Viele Sinti wurden sterilisiert, viele vergast. Melanie Spitta, die mit dem Otto-Pankok-Preis ausgezeichnet wurde, hat in einem ihrer Filme mit alten Leuten gesprochen, die Auschwitz überlebt haben und gerne Kinder gehabt hätten, aber sterilisiert worden sind.

### *Warum tun sich europäische Gesellschaften damit so schwer, Roma und Sinti in ihrer Mitte zu akzeptieren?*

Dieses Problem betrifft nicht nur die Roma und Sinti. Man erwartet von Menschen, die hierher kommen – ob es Türken sind oder andere – dass sie im Grunde ihr Herkommen aufgeben und sich anpassen. Ich weiß nicht, ob das richtig ist. Offenbar ist ein Großteil unserer Bevölkerung unfähig zu akzeptieren, dass in dieser Vielfalt ein Reichtum begründet ist. Diese große Minderheit der Roma – es sind in Europa weit über 10 Millionen – ist eine Minderheit, die nie einen eigenen Staat gefordert hat, also nicht separatistisch ist, es sind eigentlich geborene Europäer. Sie haben keine Scheu, Grenzen zu übertreten. Wenn man nach Amerika fährt – und dort gibt es viel, was man kritisieren kann – sind viele Bürger stolz auf die Herkunft ihrer Vorfahren. Iren, die eingewandert sind, Polen, Juden, Chinesen, sie alle haben ihren Rückhalt auch, in dem sie Reste ihrer Kultur aufrechterhalten

können. Es hilft ihnen beim Überleben. Warum sollte man den Roma und Sinti nicht Gleiches zugestehen? Man spricht von Parallelgesellschaften. Das ist ein Schlagwort, das eigentlich nur ein Zeugnis von Unduldsamkeit ist.

*Was ist für Sie der originäre kulturelle Beitrag der Roma und Sinti?*

Uns allen ist ja bekannt, welche Anstöße den Roma zu verdanken sind, ob in Spanien oder auch in Ungarn – nehmen wir nur die Musik: Der Pianist Schiff hat kürzlich in einem Interview gesagt, dass Bela Bartok in den 40iger Jahren in Ungarn angegriffen worden ist – mit ein Grund, warum er nach Amerika auswanderte –, weil er es gewagt hatte, als ungarischer Komponist rumänische Volkslieder zu vertonen. Das ist eine Haltung, wie es sie auch heute noch in Ungarn zu geben scheint, eine Art von engstirnigem Nationalismus ohne Verständnis für eine Gruppe, die nicht an Nationen gebunden ist. Das Erstaunliche ist für mich: Obgleich die Roma keinen staatlichen Zusammenhalt haben, gibt es doch ein ungeheures Verständnis zwischen ihnen, einen kulturellen Zusammenhang. Das ist eine enorme Kulturleistung, die die Sinti und Roma erbracht haben.

*Aber ist es nicht gerade ihr Problem, dass sie als allzu unabhängig angesehen werden?*

Das ist schon möglich, doch es ist bewundernswert. Was andere haben – staatliche Organisationen, Dachverbände, und so weiter – sie haben es nicht und haben dennoch einen Zusammenhang. Warum das andere ärgert? Vielleicht ist es Furcht, mit Aberglauben verbunden, vielleicht ist es auch Neid, dass diese Menschen, die wenig besitzen mögen, sich dennoch mit einem gewissen Stolz und Selbstbewusstsein bewegen und auf Eigenständigkeit bestehen.

*Jene, die politische Verantwortung für Romaangelegenheiten haben, beschweren sich manchmal, dass es schwierig ist, mit den Roma und Sinti zu kommunizieren.*

Viele Roma und Sinti sind vorsichtig, Fremden gegenüber, und sie haben gute Gründe, misstrauisch zu sein. Was ist nicht schwierig, wenn man sich im politischen Feld bewegt? Warum sollte es mit den Roma und den Sinti einfach sein? Ich sehe das nicht ein.

Ein Beispiel: Hier im norddeutschen Bundesland Schleswig-Holstein gibt es vernünftigerweise in der Verfassung einen Schutz für Minderheiten, der für Dänen und Friesen gilt. Der Vorstand der von meiner Frau und mir gegründeten Stiftung hat als eine seiner ersten Initiativen angeregt, die Roma und Sinti als Minderheit in die Verfassung unseres Bundeslandes aufzunehmen. Es hat dafür keine Mehrheit gegeben. Weder die Friesen noch die Dänen haben etwas dagegen gehabt. Ein Argument war, dass es die Sinti in mehreren Bundesländern gibt, während die Dänen und Friesen nur in Schleswig-Holstein eine Minderheit bilden. Es sei eher eine europäische Frage. Das wird ja gern so gehalten: Was man zu Hause nicht regeln kann, das muss europäisch geregelt werden.

*Vor nicht allzulanger Zeit haben Sie scharf gegen die erzwungene Rückführung von Roma in den Kosovo protestiert, von wo sie während der Balkankriege geflohen waren. Warum?*

Wir haben protestiert wegen der Lebensbedingungen, die die meisten Roma bei einer solchen Rückkehr erwarten. Zudem sind viele seit etlichen Jahren hier, seit Ausbruch der blutigen Konflikte auf dem Balkan. Ihre Kinder haben oft nur Deutsch gelernt. Sie sprechen die Sprache des Landes, in das man sie ausweisen will, nicht. Über eine Rückkehr sollte man erst beraten, wenn annehmbare Verhältnisse entstanden sind. Und auch dann ist es immer noch die Frage, ob es sinnvoll ist, Kinder und junge Leute, die bei uns oder in anderen europäischen Staaten aufgewachsen sind, unfreiwillig in ein Land zu schicken, das ihnen fremd ist.

*Beeinflusst das Ansteigen des Nationalismus und der extremen Rechten das politische Umfeld der Roma und Sinti?*

Aber ganz gewiss, zwar sprechen wir jetzt über Ungarn, doch Missstände gibt es in Italien schon seit geraumer Zeit, und über die Ausweisungen aus Frankreich war man erstaunt und entsetzt. Es ist vielleicht besser in Deutschland, wir sind nach wie vor gebrannte Kinder.

*Was könnte Europa tun, um mitzuhelfen, die Situation der Roma und Sinti zu verbessern?*

Es würde helfen, die Roma als europäische Minderheit anzuerkennen. Sie sollten auch einige Abgeordnete im Europäischen Parlament haben, die diese Belange vertreten.

Eines der großen Probleme, worüber wir anfangs gesprochen haben, ist unser Schul- und Ausbildungssystem, in dem die Geschichte der Sinti und Roma und ihre Besonderheiten weitgehend unbekannt sind. Hier könnte eine europäische Initiative behilflich werden. Soviel ich weiß, gibt es in der Karlsuniversität in Prag einen Lehrstuhl für die Roma-Sprache. Das begrüße ich sehr!

# Time to Break the Vicious Circle of Roma Exclusion



George Soros

## Introduction

The Roma, Europe's largest ethnic minority, are the losers of Eastern Europe's dramatic transition to democracy. Already among Europe's poorest people in 1989, since then the Roma have seen a precipitous decline in their standard of living. A long history of discrimination has been compounded by abject poverty, staggering rates of unemployment, and conditions that the UN has likened to those in sub-Saharan Africa. Roma number between 7 and 10 million people, and, although just an estimate, most observers agree that the enlargement of the European Union created some 4.5 million Roma EU citizens.

Economic woes are compounded by social tension. In every country where Roma live, the general population is hostile toward them. Despite court rulings ordering reform, Roma are regularly denied equal access to housing, education, and healthcare. In some countries, Roma children are automatically put into classes for the mentally disabled, simply because they are Roma. In others, they are shunted into separate and inferior classrooms and schools.

This practice violates the law of the European Union. The European Court of Human Rights in 2007 ruled against the Czech Republic for segregating Roma children in the town of Ostrava, but three years later the country has made almost no progress toward ending this shameful practice. The Court again ruled in 2010 against EU-candidate Croatia for segregating Roma children into separate classes. A recent study in Slovakia by the Roma Education Fund, a grant-making organization that



has invested tens of millions Euro to support Roma education, documented the systematic segregation of Roma children into schools for the mentally disabled.

The situation is not as bad in Western Europe because fewer Roma live there, but the influx from central and south-eastern Europe is generating public resistance. In Italy, the Roma are persecuted by the state, in violation of European law. France and other countries have discriminatory policies that conflate Roma migrants with their own Roma citizens. Although Spain has tried to treat Roma as equal members of society, even there, many Roma children are relegated to separate schools.

In a Europe of falling birth rates, the Roma are one of the few groups fast-growing. According to recent estimates, by 2015 roughly 25 percent of people in Hungary entering the workforce will be Roma. Demographic trends are similar in neighbouring countries. The well-being of Roma children – the future workforce of Europe – is not just a question of human rights, but of economic imperative.

Truth be told, the Roma and the majority population are caught in a vicious circle. Reality and stereotype reinforce each other in a reflexive fashion. This circle needs to be broken.

The key is to educate a new generation of Roma who succeed in society and retain their identity – not seeking to melt into the general population. The very existence of many more educated, successfully integrated Roma will shatter the prevailing negative stereotypes.

## **Investing in Education: A Way Forward**

Twenty-five years ago my Open Society Foundations recognized that the Roma were the single worst case of social exclusion on the basis of ethnicity in Europe. My first foundation was set up in Hungary in 1984, followed five years later by the foundations throughout Eastern Europe. These foundations made the education of Roma a priority. The result is a small, well-educated Roma elite that is now making an important contribution to the emancipation of Roma, both in their own countries and on the

European level. These leaders have blazed a trail for future advocates, but there are far too few of them.

While education per se is outside the purview of the European Commission, social inclusion and integration of marginalized groups are very much within the EU's competence. For the Roma, education is the key. The Commission should dedicate significantly more effort and resources in the future to education for the Roma, especially through the European Social Fund, starting with early childhood. For their part, member states should support the Roma Education Fund so that it can expand its activities as much as possible.

To avoid a permanent underclass in Europe, the Roma must be better educated and linked in many ways to the non-Roma majority through social inclusion.

## **The Decade of Roma Inclusion**

Although the EU was present at the Decade's creation, its involvement to date has been minimal. The Decade covers 12 countries mostly in Eastern Europe; half are EU members, the other half are prospective members. But the problems facing the Roma are of concern to all of Europe.

The waves of expulsions of Roma men, women, and children from France last year catapulted the issue into the headlines, but more than public attention is needed. My foundations are supporting Roma communities to organise, raise their voices, and garner international support. I have met some of the representatives of these groups and I believe they will help the Decade bring the promise of Europe to all its inhabitants.

The Decade of Roma Inclusion is now past its halfway mark. The European Union should draw on the experience of the Decade and develop its own comprehensive long-term Roma strategy because the integration of the Roma will take more than ten years.

The Decade has many useful features that the EU could integrate into its own comprehensive framework: for example, it brings together governments and civil society; it engages the member

states with a rotating presidency; and, most importantly, it engages Roma people themselves in determining effective policies.

## **The EU's role**

So far, the EU has spent close to € 350 million on Roma projects, without a comprehensive strategy. Now the Commission has been tasked with developing an EU Framework for Coordination of National Strategies. No doubt the laying out of this framework, due in April 2011, will build on the Commission's 2010 document on the social and economic integration of Roma. I hope that the "model approaches" it introduced will be strengthened and developed.

The EU Framework for coordinating national Roma strategies needs to take into account the lessons learned from previous efforts such as the OSCE Action Plan and the Decade's national action plans. One of the key lessons was that implementation is only consistent and effective if there is sustained follow-up and monitoring both by national governments and international institutions. Furthermore, the Framework should not only apply to EU member states, but also to potential members in the Balkans and Turkey.

The Commission's role needs to be that of a coordinator, ensuring that countries share policy expertise and best practice, while keeping them on task by monitoring and evaluating their progress. This can be done by looking at social inclusion and other indicators. The EU Framework should not let national governments off the hook. After all, most of the measures that would bring the Roma into mainstream society are national responsibilities rather than EU competences – particularly education, health, housing, and employment.

On funding, the EU has come a long way in making Structural Funds available for Roma projects. Now it is time to move to a much larger scale by getting member states to actually use the money for the benefit of the Roma. The recent report of the Commission's high-level Roma Task Force, published in December, showed very low absorption of EU funds on Roma.

The EU Framework should therefore include mechanisms to make sure these funds reach the Roma.

Part of the problem is that the Commission's procedures are so unwieldy. Late payments can bankrupt civil society organizations. Moreover, local municipalities are often reluctant to use the money to help the Roma.

For these reasons, my Open Society Foundations launched the initiative "Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma" to build capacity at local level and overcome cumbersome bureaucratic procedures. We have made the lessons learned from this initiative available to the Task Force and other policymakers to improve the use of the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund.

### **The Hungarian Presidency: Next Steps**

The Hungarian government, now at the helm of the EU presidency for the next six months, has made the launch of an EU Framework for National Roma inclusion strategies a priority for its term.

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán declared, "By the end of the Hungarian presidency, the European Union will have a Roma policy." This policy needs to combine a rights-based approach to end discrimination with a set of development goals for social inclusion. Roma should be guaranteed equal access to the basic services necessary to lead a life with dignity. Roma policies need to break the inter-generational transmission of poverty and disadvantage which poses grave challenges for future cohesion as well as the well-being of entire societies.

Fighting the widespread anti-Roma sentiment in Europe is a huge challenge. The use of racist and anti-Roma language in public, and by some political parties, must be met head-on; ignoring it tarnishes the credibility of the EU's fundamental values.

To conclude, I have five specific recommendations. First, the European Social Fund should give priority to education, starting with early childhood development as a tool for social inclusion

under the Europe 2020 strategy. Second, member states should support the Roma Education Fund so that it can scale up its work. Third, the EU has endorsed the principle of “explicit but not exclusive targeting” in funding for the Roma, particularly in housing. This principle should be applied in education, health, and employment as well. Fourth, the EU should use its leverage with member states to engage their political commitment at national and local levels. I look for the commitment of Commissioner Reding in particular to this cause. Fifth, the EU must use its leverage with future members to ensure that no country is allowed to join until it treats all its citizens equally.

It will take decades to improve this situation. Roma communities have suffered centuries of discrimination and generations of unemployment, so their expectations and those of the majority society will take time to adjust. But the start is long overdue.

# Roma and the Politics of Demographic Imagination



Ivan Krastev

In his novel *Death with Interruptions* Noble prize-winning novelist José Saramago imagines a world where people will live so long that death will lose its central role in human life (death has simply disappeared). It sounds like a utopia, but it turns out to be anti-utopia. At first, people are gripped by euphoria. But soon, “awkwardness” of various kinds – metaphysical, political, practical – starts to re-enter their world. The Catholic Church realises that “without death there is no resurrection, and without resurrection there is no church.” For insurance companies, life without death also means oblivion. The state faces the impossible task of paying pensions forever. Families with elderly and infirm relatives understand that only death saves them from an eternity of attentive care. A country where no one dies inevitably becomes a pitiless, Malthusian dystopia. A mafia-style cabal emerges to smuggle old and sick people to neighbouring countries to die (death is still an option there). The prime minister warns the monarch: “If we don’t start dying again, we have no future”.

Saramago’s anti-utopia can serve as a superb introduction to Europe’s “age of ageing”. It is also an introduction to the new normal in European politics on the aftermath of the global economic crisis. We are at a point when the demographic imagination defeats the democratic imagination. The democratic imagination that has reigned over the last few decades inspired us with the promise that we can change the world. The democratic imagination is universalist and expansionist and it was pushing the world to the left. The demographic imagination terrifies us with the prospect that the world will change us. It is

particularistic and protectionist and it pushes Europe to the right. Democratic imagination has shaped Europe that is optimistic and self-confident. Demographic imagination shapes the politics of fears and gloom. The latest global survey of “hope and despair in the world” conducted by Gallup International at the end of 2010 in 56 countries over five continents demonstrated that prosperous Europeans are among the most pessimistic citizens of the planet.

The unimaginable success of Thilo Sarrazin’s book “Germany Abolishes Itself” (it is probably the bestselling ever political book in post-war Europe) followed by the German Chancellor’s and British Prime Minister’s remarks on the “death of multiculturalism” is a sign for the new zeitgeist in European politics. It is a major understatement to read Sarrazin’s book as an attack on political correctness, in reality the book marks the emergence of a new political correctness that rejects the pro-minority bias of the last decades and which expresses the bottled neck panic of the dominant ethnic groups in the EU member states. A new actor has emerged in European politics – the threatened majorities. They feel like minorities, they talk like minorities and they feel betrayed by their elites. European societies – until yesterday the perceived winners of the process of globalization – now started to view globalization as an existential threat to their prosperity, influence and way of life.

In new demography obsessed Europe, majority of people already psychologically live with the fear that they have lost control of their own societies. Europe’s political dilemma articulated by the demographic imagination is that if Europeans want to preserve their social institutions (their welfare state) they should either learn to live with people who come from very different social and cultural background, or else accept the decline of their standards of living, the much higher retirement age and at the end of the day Europe’s geopolitical irrelevance.

The rise of demographic imagination is at the heart of the new populist turn in European politics. It is demography related fears that in a perverse way united Western Europe and the new member states. There are also differences. While West European

debate is Islam-centred, the Central European debate is Roma centred (more than 75 percent of the Roma community living in Europe is settled in the new member states). While Central Europe suffers from the impact of the massive wave of emigration – not immigration – that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall, the anti-Roma sentiments is a warning sign of how Central Europe will look when it turns from emigrants sending to immigrants receiving region. A recent survey conducted in Bulgaria demonstrated that the imagined immigrants from Asia and Africa are the most feared of social group. The public's negativism against them is even higher than against the Roma.

Keeping in mind that the demographic trends in the new member states are even worse than in Western Europe, it is easy to imagine that Central Europe can soon become the new capital of anti-immigrant intolerance. East European states were never colonial powers, so they feel neither guilt, nor particular sentiments for those coming to look for chances from the distant places of the world. And while the paranoia about Islam is the incarnation of the cultural fears of the West-European publics, the anti-Roma sentiment in Central Europe is the embodiment of the predominantly social fears of post-communist societies. In this sense the success or failure to integrate Roma in European society is the real test for the success or failure of European democracies to survive in times of economic and demographic anxieties.

The rage against the elites and the rejection of Roma are a distinctive feature of Central European populism. In the populist imagination the new cosmopolitan elites and the Roma minority paradoxically are two privileged groups that try to escape the common lot. The elites benefited from destroying the welfare state, Roma benefit from misusing its remnants. Elites avoid paying taxes by registering their companies in offshore heavens, Roma do not pay their electricity bills and wait for the state to pay them. The dangerous fall out of this situation is that progressive elites are powerless to get public support for inclusive policies while other parts of the elite are tempted to use anti-Roma and nationalistic rhetoric to overcome the mistrust of the public.



The real problem that Central European democracies face is not the rise of anti-Roma violence (it is still relatively limited); it is not the rise of anti-Roma attitudes (a recent survey of the social attitudes in Bulgaria for example indicates that there is no increase of anti-Roma intolerance in the last years), and it is not even the rise of extreme parties that openly target the Roma minority.

The problem is the erosion and delegitimation of the liberal, pro-minority consensus that prevailed among the political, economic and cultural elites in the last two decades and the emergence of a new consensus that expresses the fears and delusions of the threatened majorities. If, some years ago, the majority was ready to agree that the state institutions were to be blamed for the failures of Roma integration, now we have reached a moment when the failures of integration are blamed on the minority groups themselves and on their unwillingness or inability to integrate. The public were failed to be impressed by the legitimate claims of human rights groups who showed that the disproportionate number of Roma in prison is the result of the fact that judges tend to send Roma offenders to prison with much more enthusiasm than others. At present the rights' discourse is counter-productive when it comes to mobilizing majority support for the integration of minorities.

## **The Populist Turn**

The liberal era that began in Central Europe in 1989 has come to an end. The language of rights is exhausted and what we can see in the last years is the decline of civil society and the rise of uncivil society. The new hard reality in Central Europe is political polarization and rejection of consensual politics. The growing tensions between democracy and liberalism, the rise of "organised intolerance," increasing demands for direct democracy, and the proliferation of charismatic leaders capable of mobilizing public anger make it almost impossible to avoid drawing parallels between the current political turmoil in Central Europe and the crisis of democracy in Europe between the World Wars. The global economic crisis that hit some of the new member states particularly strong, made many believe that what they should expect is a new "Weimar moment". The policies of some Central

European governments, particularly Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary, gave a currency to this interpretation. Many are drawing parallels between the fate of the Jews in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe and the rise of anti-Roma sentiments in early 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe. In my view, most of these comparisons are good literature but bad sociology. The analogies with 1930s are misleading ones. Unlike in Europe in the 1930s, there is no ideological alternative to democracy. The economies of the countries in the region are recovering after the shock of 2008 and the membership of the Central European countries in the EU and NATO provides a safeguard for democracy and liberal institutions. The streets of Budapest and Warsaw today are flooded not by ruthless paramilitary formations in search of a final solution, but by restless consumers in search of a final sale. And while some of the recent political developments in the region are disturbing, it is incorrect to draw direct parallels between Europe now and Europe then.

There is another analogy that illuminates the recent events in Central Europe better than that of the interwar European democracies. It is West Germany in 1968 rather than Weimar Germany in 1933 that offers the key to understanding the current crisis. Today, as in 1968, the crisis came after two decades of successful economic recovery and a period of amnesia about the past. The turmoil was unexpected and frightening. The crisis of democracy in 1968 was rooted not in the failure of democratic institutions but in the success of the post-war West German project of modernization and democratization. Then, as today, there was a talk about the hollowness of democratic institutions and the need for a moral revolution. In Germany then, as in Central Europe now, there were appeals for a "new republic" and a rejection of the politics of soulless pragmatism. Then, as now, there was a major transformation in the cultural and geopolitical context. The word "populism" was in the air, and people demanded more direct democracy. Now, like then, the crisis of democratic institutions is the result of the democratization of society and not of its turn against democracy.

Here, however, the similarities end. What is different about the current "populist revolution" is that it is shaped by conservative

sensibilities. The new self-proclaimed “revolutionaries” of today fear not the authoritarianism of the state but the excesses of postmodern culture and the collapse of traditional values. They are nostalgic and not utopian, defensive and not visionary. In 1968, the spirit of the times was individualistic, emancipatory, and libertarian. That is not the case today.

Now, unlike then, the challenge to the system is coming not from the left but from the right, and the new dream is not global solidarity but national exceptionalism. The populists of 1968 were “educationalists”: they wanted to empower the people as they believed the people should be. The populists of today want power for the people as it is. The revolutionaries of 1968 had a passion for “the other,” for those who are not like us. The populists of today have a passion for their own community, for those who are just like us. In a sense the populist revolution that we are witnessing in Central Europe today is a revolt against the values, sensibilities, symbols, and elites of 1968. In the modern age, nothing is more revolutionary than what only yesterday seemed the height of reaction.

Thinking in terms of 1968 tempts us to view the current crisis of liberalism in Central Europe not as a “particular” crisis of post-communist democracies, but as one aspect of the transformation of democracy in the European Union as a whole. The heart of the conflict is the clash between the liberal rationalism embodied by EU institutions and the populist revolt against the unaccountability of the elites. Liberal elites fear that modern societies are becoming ungovernable. Populists fear that modern elites have become totally unaccountable. Both fears are legitimate.

## **What Not to be Done**

And here comes the major challenge that any anti-xenophobic initiative will face. Europe is experiencing its “neoconservative moment”, the liberal consensus is unravelled, there is a profound shift in the sensibilities of the public, elites are mistrusted, so what worked yesterday will not necessarily work today. Any attempt for progressivism from above will not only fail but



*Three generations. Belgrade, 2010*

backfire. Any policy structured around the traditional four pillars of pro-minority policies – 1) blaming and shaming the anti-Roma groups; 2) mobilizing the anti-discrimination constituencies and taking them to the streets; 3) politically organizing the Roma groups themselves, and 4) pressing the institutions on both national and European level to sanction anti-minority rhetoric and actions – will not solve the problems we face.

Unfortunately there is a profound crisis of solidarity both on the level of the EU and on the level of the member states. The language of European standards and norms that was effective in the time of accession, when it comes to standards in treating minorities, has lost most of its power at the very moment when Central Europeans witnessed how Roma are treated in France or Italy. Legal approach should give priority to political approach. It is not Brussels but the national political process that should give a chance to the integration of the Roma.

In this new situation in which institutions are more Roma-friendly than societies, it is very important for political parties to find a way to talk with the majority groups and to re-frame the political debate about Roma into a debate about the future of European societies as a whole. In the absence of such a conversation all institutional moves will have limited effect. The truth is that blaming and shaming will not be effective because not only extremist politicians, but a majority of citizens in places like Bulgaria, Romania or Slovakia, tend to believe that the Roma themselves should be blamed for the failures of integration. Framing the Roma issue exclusively as a rights issue and viewing Roma exclusively in ethnic terms can strengthen anti-Roma sentiments.

Mobilization of the anti-discrimination groups is important but it can also have limited results. Unfortunately in most of Central European countries the mobilization potential of extremist groups is higher than that of democratic and minority rights-minded citizens when we talk about getting people onto the streets.

When it comes to institutional responses, it is very important to distinguish between sanctioning the hate speech and suppressing discussion critical of the current integration policies. In a public space more and more dominated by the Internet and the echo chambers it creates, any attempt to suppress dangerous conversations will end up creating even more powerful anti-establishment and anti-Roma reactions. The only politics that can work is one that on one side best uses institutions, and particularly the judicial system, in order to address the individual cases of injustices and discrimination against Roma and at the same time initiates an honest debate that addresses the fears and the concerns of the demographically obsessed publics. The rights of the minorities cannot be successfully defended when the legitimate fears of the majorities are neglected.

# **What Role for the European Union?**



# EU Roma Actions – The Evolution of Policies and Instruments

## The escalation of Roma exclusion



László Andor

The summer of 2010 was overshadowed by a clampdown against immigrant Roma in various Western European countries. Widely perceived as discriminatory, these expulsions added to long-standing calls by NGOs and others that the EU adopts a more robust approach to protecting the rights of Roma people and promoting their social and economic inclusion.

The European Commission understands that member states want to protect themselves against destitute migrants. However, expulsion does not solve, but merely displaces problems. The idea that the movement of Roma people between EU member states reflects some kind of essential “wanderlust” is, to put it mildly, unhelpful. Along with other migrants, Roma people relocate in the hope of finding better opportunities than they have at home. It is not hard to see why.

Surveys consistently show that across Europe the socio-economic conditions of Roma people are generally worse than those of the majority and other ethnic minorities and immigrants. High levels of poverty and unemployment, poor housing, limited access to health and welfare services mean that on average Roma live a decade less than their “non-Roma” compatriots. Roma people are also subject to widespread prejudice and discrimination and many experience the most extreme deprivation and social isolation in Europe today.

Roma exclusion has to be tackled – but this is a lot easier said than done. In recent years, there have been numerous initiatives aimed at improving the living conditions and life chances of Roma



people. However, many of them have failed to take into account the diversity and complexity of the political challenges that are bundled up under the heading “Roma issues”. Just as the term “Roma” is used to denote a wide range of people and communities with different languages, cultures and identities, the social, economic and political circumstances of Roma people and the public authorities responsible are equally differentiated.

In Western states, some communities maintain a travelling lifestyle, while others live in segregated camps or settlements on marginal land. In Eastern Europe, large non-travelling Roma minorities are an indictment of the failures of the post-communist transition. As old borders have disappeared and Europeans have been able to take advantage of the EU’s fundamental principle of the free movement of people, the poverty and marginalisation of Roma people in their homelands has created transnational dimension to the challenge of Roma integration. The recent financial and economic crisis exacerbates the situation further, the true social consequences of which are yet to come.

## **From common principles to EU framework**

The social and economic integration of Roma calls for a sustained commitment based on joint cooperation. In a recent decision, the Commission reiterated that this represents a common challenge and a common responsibility for all EU member states. Nevertheless, member states have the primary responsibility to deliver on inclusion and to ensure that their Roma citizens and residents are protected against prejudice and discrimination.

For more than a decade, the EU institutions (the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Council of Ministers) have regularly introduced measures to improve the social and economic integration of the Roma. Two Roma summits organised with the Commission have involved Roma activists and policy makers from across the continent to exchange views. In close co-operation with the Commission, the European Platform has elaborated the Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion to aid the design, implementation and evaluation of policies which are relevant to Roma inclusion. The Commission has recently

been implementing the pilot project “Pan-European Coordination of Roma Integration Methods – Roma Inclusion”, including three components relating to early childhood education, a self-employment/microcredit scheme and awareness raising activities. In addition, while fully respecting member states’ primary competence in this field, the EU institutions have made available substantial funding under the EU Funds to support projects and complement member states’ actions on Roma integration.

Furthermore; in April 2010, the Commission presented a Communication on the social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe<sup>1</sup>, which outlines a series of important measures that need to be taken at national and EU level to improve the situation of the Roma as quickly as possible. Following the Communication, in September 2010 the Commission established an internal Task Force to assess member states’ use of EU funding and its effectiveness with regard to the social and economic integration of Roma.

In April 2011, the Commission intends to build on the work of the Roma Task Force, as well as the four meetings of the Platform for Roma inclusion to present an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. This EU framework will promote more effective implementation of EU funds intended for tackling Roma exclusion and efficient monitoring of national and European efforts with regard to Roma integration. To this end, and in line with Europe 2020, the Commission will be inviting member states to present their own national strategies for the inclusion of Roma which should feature in their National Reform Programmes.

In these National Reform Programmes member states set out their national targets in the fields of poverty reduction, employment and education in view of the targets set by Europe 2020. The Commission not only expects the member states to present explicit and ambitious quantitative and qualitative targets, but also envisages that the monitoring system in place will become a continuous mechanism that improves the implementation of the strategy. In several member states it will not be possible to meet

<sup>1</sup> COM(2010)133.

2020 targets without serious and successful National Roma Integration Strategies.

It is important to design tailor-made, holistic approaches in each Member State since education, health, employment and welfare services ultimately fall under the responsibility of the given member states. It is time that national and regional authorities started to take responsibility and be accountable for their actions.

Considering the different types of Roma communities, we have to set medium- and long-term objectives for micro-regions. This geographic approach is also crucial to identify many of the most vulnerable Roma communities and facilitate measurement of the effectiveness of various Roma integration programmes.

The Commission will present an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies in time for the Roma Platform in early April. It will also work to unlock the new potential for growth, removing the obstacles to sustainable growth, using poverty, employment and education targets and by mobilising the main EU policy instruments for growth and jobs, which will also have an impact on the Roma.

The EU Framework will, in particular, streamline, assess and benchmark the use of EU funds by all member states concerning Roma integration and identify underpinning deficiencies in the use of funds.

### **Integration programmes for the Roma, by the Roma**

The overwhelming majority of Europe's Roma are citizens of the state in which they were born and live. The European Commission recognises that integration means enabling Roma people to enjoy the same rights, standards and opportunities as any other citizen. The participation of Roma organisations in the design, implementation and evaluation of their inclusion programmes is fundamentally important.

In order to foster real inclusion, it is critical that Roma programmes are not disconnected from mainstream policies on education, employment, public health or urban planning. Policies

need to be explicit but not exclusive from an ethnic point of view, and must seek the full inclusion of Roma into the mainstream society.

Successful programmes are not ethnically exclusive, but focus on people facing the similar socio-economic problems or who are at risk of discrimination. Ultimately, a shared and collective understanding and commitment from society is vital to ensure real social inclusion of disadvantaged groups. The 2010 “Roma opening” in Turkey demonstrated the significance of giving the Roma community the needed recognition and dignity.

Nevertheless, as many Roma representatives have pointed out, actions to promote Roma integration have to be done with the Roma people, not for them. If we want to achieve real and lasting results, the responsible national, local and regional authorities must work with Roma communities to promote ownership of the projects intended for them. It is only by adhering to this philosophy that we will bring about visible progress and raise awareness among all European citizens that Roma inclusion is good for the economy and society as a whole.

We must also address the issue that Roma themselves are not sufficiently involved in the implementation of programmes funded by the EU. This is partly because Roma NGOs and NGOs targeting Roma communities often lack the organisational and financial capacity to successfully apply for funding and thus, to implement projects. Capacity building is the first step. The member states should use more of the EU's resources for technical assistance to help the Roma apply for EU funding and to support capacity building for potential aid recipients.

In addition, the member states should also implement the simplification measures which have been introduced in 2009 and 2010 in EU funds Regulations, for example, by making use of the option to reimburse flat rate, indirect costs and paying lump sum grants. However, the regulation of EU funds, and particularly the ESF, needs to be further simplified, as part of the broader effort to make EU financial instruments more pro-Roma.

It is important to reduce the administrative burden upon beneficiaries to a minimum, thus facilitating their access to EU funds. member states should also remove obstacles to employing financial engineering instruments, such as micro-credits. In the future we might consider providing incentives, for example a higher EU co-financing rate, for member states that apply simplified rules.

## **EU Structural Funds serving Roma inclusion**

To achieve the national targets the EU's Structural Funds, the combined EUR 50 billion per year of the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) offer a unique financial lever for supporting national efforts to improve the situation of Roma. However, these funds are often used ineffectively, failing to achieve their full potential.

It is clear that a number of member states are reluctant to allocate sufficient EU funds to actions in favour of social inclusion, particularly for the Roma. In others, the current economic crisis and subsequent financial constraints have slowed down the delivery of EU funds. This is particularly the case in member states that have large Roma minorities but face difficulties in providing the co-financing of projects which is required by the regulations of the Structural Funds.

In the short term, the Commission intends to continue promoting coordinated dialogue and raising the awareness of the opportunities offered by the existing operational programmes for the implementation of EU funds. In 2009 and 2010, the Commission focused on actions in Hungary and Romania respectively; in 2011, the focus will be on Slovakia and Bulgaria. To ensure progress in this area, the Commission also requests the regular and frequent reporting of Roma integration in Monitoring Committee meetings and Annual Review meetings.

In the longer term, the Commission intends to strengthen the result-orientated interventions of the funds. In this context, it considers better linking the use of EU funds to quantitative targets – possibly making use of performance reserves as

positive incentives – and making the achievement of milestones, set at programme level, a condition for further funding. Facilitating the implementation measures benefitting the most disadvantaged groups, for example through a higher EU co-financing rate, could also be considered.

The fight against poverty and social exclusion has been identified as one of the main priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy. It therefore needs to be adequately supported by EU funds and in particular the ESF. As such, the inclusion of most disadvantaged groups, including the Roma, should figure prominently among the priorities of the Common Strategic Framework for cohesion policy.

Disadvantaged Roma are often confronted with multiple problems which need to be tackled via holistic approaches combing several policies and various funds. In practice, however, the implementation of such proposals has proven difficult. The Commission will therefore look for ways to simplify the use of EU funds for complex strategies by better delineating the role of each of the funds and by facilitating multi-fund financing. In the period between 2007 and 2013, the European Social Fund will invest an estimated €76 billion, of which some 18% – more than €10 billion – is earmarked for projects that combat social exclusion. Every year, some 1 million people from vulnerable groups benefit from these financial interventions.

With this in mind, the Commission plans to set up an Ad Hoc group, dealing with the use of EU funds for Roma integration bringing together member states, to help them to implement the complex approaches needed to make use of all available measures. In the longer term, I hope to see integrated approaches and an enhanced use of EU Funds to address the situation of the Roma adequately, becoming the norm at national level.

Despite offering significant support to facilitate the governance and administrative capacity, some member states still lack effective administrative structures to absorb the funds but also to coordinate between national, regional and local levels. To ease bottlenecks and to facilitate access to EU funding for NGOs working directly with disadvantaged Roma, member states, which face obvious difficulties in making effective use of EU



*Shop. Romania, 2011*

funds, can involve international organisations. These can work with local and other authorities to build their capacity to deliver to their Roma clients. member states should also put in place coordination mechanisms to ensure the flow of information and feedback on the Roma programmes between the various levels of government and throughout society as a whole.

### **Social inclusion in the Europe 2020 strategy**

Europe 2020 was designed and adopted in 2010 to provide orientation to the economic and social development of Europe in the next decade. As part of this strategy, the Commission launched the Flagship Initiative “European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion” on 16 December 2010. This Platform recognises that, in order to foster an inclusive and cohesive European society, special attention will have to be paid to the Roma, as they are highly vulnerable to discrimination, unemployment and social exclusion. The Platform will serve as a visible expression of solidarity towards the most vulnerable members of our societies; more specifically, it will constitute an integrated framework of actions to support horizontal priorities

such as the integration of Roma. In addition, it will work towards the Europe 2020 poverty reduction target to lift at least 20 million Europeans out of the risk of poverty; Roma are an important target group for action in this area.

The Europe 2020 strategy places “inclusive growth” at the heart of our actions foreseen for the next decade. Inclusive growth involves a commitment to include those individuals furthest from the labour market and to provide quality social services and adequate social protection to the most vulnerable members of our societies. A truly inclusive social agenda requires policy mainstreaming in all relevant areas, such as combating poverty, improving skills, and ensuring social cohesion as well as higher level of employment.

The Roma are the European Union’s largest minority and yet they are also one of the most socially excluded groups. Many Roma communities experience multiple disadvantages, including unemployment, segregation, discrimination, limited access to social services and care. Addressing such interrelated problems is an expensive and complex task, requiring a holistic approach that considers all areas in which the Roma may face obstacles hindering their full participation in the economy and society. This approach needs to tackle the root causes of Roma exclusion, in particular by looking at education and employment.

Roma children need to be given a fair start in life. The Commission is committed to promoting Early Childhood Development and the desegregation of schools and kindergartens, as well as fighting the wider phenomenon of “early school leavers” across Europe. Increasing the employability of Roma people means ensuring access to quality education and training.

Promoting Roma employment will also require looking at ways to ensure that the skills of the young Roma generation are adapted to the needs of tomorrow’s labour markets. Young Roma should be supported through positive actions in the area of vocational education and training, which take into account regional, national and international forecasts of labour market demand. It is also vital to provide post-training support to help



people in the workplace or own businesses, to maintain their competitiveness. This kind of support is a pre-condition for the sustainable integration of young Roma into the labour market.

Improving the employment prospects for Roma people is another key area that the Commission will focus on. Providing decent jobs is the most effective way of breaking the vicious circle of poverty transmission from generation to generation. We need to put in place territorial strategies to promote the social integration by facilitating access to the network of services available in areas where Roma live and by increasing tailor-made support to help people enter their local labour markets. One potential tool to make the impact of European funding more sustainable, could be the promotion of cooperatives adapted to the specific circumstances of Roma communities, the formalisation of “grey” economic activities – for example, by using micro-financing projects.

The multidimensional problems facing the Roma minorities will be dealt with in the framework of enhanced cooperation between all stakeholders. As such, the Commission will be addressing the issue of Roma inclusion in all relevant EU policies, including social and territorial cohesion, economic development, fundamental rights, gender equality, protection against discrimination, access to employment, education, housing, health and social services, justice, sports and culture, as well as in EU's relations with third countries, in particular (potential) candidate countries. In addition, the Commission will strive to better harness the potential of evidence based social innovation to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the spectrum of social interventions and policies aimed at supporting Roma integration.

The Commission remains committed to supporting member states in their efforts and the policy initiatives to be undertaken under the Europe 2020 Strategy. Their National Reform Programmes will be the cornerstones of their action; but the EU will provide a supportive policy framework through reinforced monitoring and guidance mechanisms. It is only through an alliance of the EU, member states, local governments, NGOs, and grassroots Roma organisations that we can break the vicious circle of social exclusion.

# The Imperative of Roma Integration



Viviane Reding

There are approximately 10-12 million Roma in Europe, most of whom are disadvantaged in several respects and are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, discrimination, segregation and extreme poverty. Roma are particularly exposed to high rates of unemployment or are largely operating in the informal economy.

For the Commission, the Roma issue is more than a summer story. We have been active for over ten years in this field while member states were reluctant to commit. Across the European Union, certainly, more needs to be done.

On 7th April 2010, the Commission set out a comprehensive strategic approach in its Communication on the social and economic integration of Roma in (COM(2010)133 final). The Commission put the issue of Roma integration into a broader perspective. We set out a strategy to have an agenda for fighting poverty, improving skills, bolstering social cohesion and increasing employment.

Also the Roma themselves play a key role in their own integration. Integration policies must be designed with the Roma and not just for the Roma. Failing to involve Roma in the design of effective integration policies to finally break the poverty cycle is a recipe for failure.

The European Union can also help creating opportunities through the Structural Funds. EU funds are often not fully used or not used in an effective way. In September 2010, the Commission established a Roma Task Force to examine how EU funds can

help to further strengthen national measures for Roma integration. The Task Force has found no evidence of strong, proportionate and specific measures in place in the member states to improve the social and economic situation of the Roma community. Bottlenecks at national, regional and local levels are limiting the effective use by member states of EU funds for Roma inclusion.

The report also identifies problems in providing national co-financing as well as a lack of involvement by civil society and Roma communities themselves.

To help tackle these issues, the Commission will present an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies in April 2011. The EU Framework will make proposals for a more effective implementation of EU funds to tackle Roma exclusion and will also ensure a more efficient monitoring of the national efforts with regard to Roma integration. To that end the Commission will invite member states – both countries of origin and host countries – to present their own national strategies for the integration of Roma. The Commission will also associate the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency to bring in particular its valuable work in the field of data collection. Integration policies must be evidence-based.

The integration of Roma in Europe can no longer wait. We have a major task ahead of us and we have set our sights high. It is now for all policy-makers to show that the commitment to this largest European minority is not just a one-off matter.

# The Need for a Coordinated EU Response



Kinga Göncz and Claude Moraes

The expulsions of Roma EU citizens carried out by French authorities last year led to an unprecedented reaction from parliamentarians, grassroots civil society organisations and the wider European public. It was reassuring to see the commitment of those seeking to protect the fundamental rights of one of Europe's largest minorities. The pressure on the French government should warn against France or other European countries carrying out similar treatment in the future. Whilst it was France in the headlines, we know all too well that such practices are not confined to that country. Therefore, we will need to remain vigilant against all discriminatory treatment against the Roma across the EU and strive to ensure that the now binding Charter of Fundamental Rights means something to EU citizens in practice.

Beyond the issue of discrimination, what this episode brought to the attention of policy makers across Europe is the deeper issue of the need for a comprehensive strategy at EU-level to address the deep poverty and exclusion faced by the Roma. In the European Parliament we have been calling for such a strategy for a number of years. There is now, however, a broader recognition of the pressing need for a coordinated EU response, particularly by the European Commission and the member states, as reflected in the upcoming EU Strategy on Roma Inclusion. The marginalisation of Roma communities across the EU is widely documented. The EU Fundamental Rights Agency has consistently highlighted the widespread discrimination they face, in particular in access to vital services such as health and education. This discrimination, combined with deep poverty, leads to a vicious cycle of marginalisation and social exclusion. It is

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critical therefore that we build on the current momentum to achieve the promise of a truly social Europe, a Europe which is based on fundamental rights, equal opportunities and the social inclusion of all communities, including the Roma.

A key question for us as Members of the European Parliament is what role should the EU play in addressing the situation of the Roma? It is true that many of the core problems facing the Roma are in areas that are primarily the responsibility of member states, including housing, education and health. Whilst this should highlight the need for the commitment of member states to improving the situation of the Roma, it should not detract from the very positive role that the EU can play in addition to the individual member states. The core of this relates to the supervision and coordination of national policies, by keeping track of progress, assessing and disseminating best practice whilst also highlighting bad practice. Although the majority of the work with Roma communities operates at the regional and local level, EU funding plays a key role in the financing of local projects and initiatives. However, more work needs to be done to ensure that the funding is reaching communities who need it most, and that the projects supported by the EU are making a real difference to people's lives. This calls for improved monitoring and evaluation, as well as the proper consultation and participation of Roma communities themselves.

In this spirit, we want to highlight the important work of some local projects to show how grassroots initiatives on the ground in Roma communities can have a real impact on people's lives, and to highlight the ways that the EU funding framework can be improved.

In order to get a clearer insight into this issue, however, we have to step back a little and examine the recent history of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, where these communities were the main victims of the transition in the 90's. The majority of them being unskilled and lacking the necessary qualifications and skills, they were the first who lost their low paid jobs and consequently their decent living conditions. They were the first who had to leave their urban homes and move to run-down rural areas

with no services and possibilities to work. Most of these people have been unemployed ever since and have no real prospects of finding a job. And although substantial measures have been taken in several member states to improve the living standards of the Roma and also their chances, their situation has remained miserable.

The EU has already spent huge amounts of money with the aim of improving the living conditions of EU citizens in general, but we can only see few tangible results in the case of the Roma people. The lack of defining who the Roma are and also the absence of necessary and reliable data on their socio-economic situation make the targeted use of EU funds difficult if not impossible. Without detailed surveys about the distribution and the effects of EU funds on the lives of the Roma, we do not know what areas have been improved and what fields have to be developed. Therefore, we need clear indicators, benchmarks, and then, independent monitoring and impact assessment mechanisms to evaluate the efficiency of the financing.

There is however another issue to be remembered, i.e. absorption capacity. Most EU member states have more or less learnt by now how to absorb EU funds, but the most deprived social groups do not have the necessary knowledge and help to apply for EU assistance. There are too big gaps between their world and that of the EU tenders.

We are talking about those hundreds of thousands of people who are deprived of their basic human needs. Who live in substandard houses with no basic amenities in segregated neighbourhoods, where there is no infrastructure, and where poverty and social exclusion are transmitted from parents to children.

Thanks to committed people and organizations working with the communities themselves, there are a number of local and regional initiatives which respond to the diverse needs of the Roma people. Those working on these projects know that without complex and flexible help, target- and development-oriented assistance real improvement is hardly possible. Nevertheless, they often face a huge difficulty, and that is the generally

bureaucratic and rigid framework of EU funding. Another problem for them is that even if EU funds do respond to the local needs, the short term funding does not allow making long-lasting effects on the lives of the Roma purely because funds run out after a certain period and local authorities and communities cannot finance them on their own.

So, how can the EU still be successful? The answer is simple: it has to support local initiatives, those projects which answer the diverse needs of the diverse Roma communities, and financial support should be provided for a longer term.

Let us see some examples to prove that: a common view is that prevention of marginalisation should begin in early childhood, by means of taking part in education starting as early and staying as long as possible. However, it does not only mean that new schools should be built, that Roma children should be granted free text books or mediators should be employed by schools. The problem has deeper roots. In certain villages and settlements it is not only these things that are needed. If children live in sub-standard housing circumstances without sufficient food, with no proper clothes to put on, and no free transport to get to school, then it is not books that are needed first. In a Hungarian village of about 200 inhabitants living without electricity, running water, heating and sanitation, this realisation led to a project of constructing a community bath- and washroom, a heated playroom and study for children, and replacing broken windows to avoid immediate health- and life-threatening circumstances in the settlement. Of course, further help was needed to provide proper clothes for the children, and also a willingness and financial means of the local self-government to hire a bus to take the children to the nearest school being 10 km away. It was only at this stage that free books were really welcome, that mediators could start their work, and that the process of the integration of these children has actually started. Naturally, there are also similar prerequisites for the adults of the village to find work. And we all know that if parents are unemployed, they cannot afford paying for their electricity or heating bills, no matter how much money has been spent earlier on improving their housing condition.

However, these positive steps are not sufficient to help the integration of the most deprived Roma communities. The process of catching up is a slow one. A lot of work and help are needed to prepare the children and in the long run the whole community to be able to take the advantage of their opportunities. In the case of the above-mentioned Hungarian village, social workers supporting the local community for years, teachers teaching the children and their parents develop their skills were essential in order to integrate into the kindergartens and schools, and thus into society.

As mentioned earlier, another major setback of otherwise reasonable EU funds responding to local needs is that they are usually available only for a short term, and therefore do not offer a real way out of poverty for deprived Roma communities. Without long-term financial support and mentoring even the best projects are doomed to be unsuccessful. A good example for that would be a training project for unemployed Roma women launched in a segregated village of Eastern Hungary. The aim of the project was to teach women how to cultivate plants and make bouquets, and in the end sell them in bigger towns at weekly markets. But despite feasibility studies and pre-sale analyses, the products proved to be very difficult to sell. Unfortunately, before the local NGO which supported the project found other possibilities to obtain orders for their products, and before the undertaking became profitable, the EU funds ran out and women became unemployed again. What is more, their frustration was even higher than previously.

Based on the previous examples, we firmly believe that EU funding has a significant role to play but only if it supports good local initiatives, if it provides financial help for a longer term so that projects become sustainable, and if it is flexible enough so that bureaucracy does not put an end to promising local projects. We should learn from the good and bad practices. Sharing them with each other could help us to better use our means for the benefit of a just and tolerant society.



Our further recommendations are the following:

- The EU must develop a comprehensive action plan for the Roma, and must move beyond fine words to actually ensuring this is implemented on the ground. Concrete targets should be set, together with specific steps to reach these targets.
- The consultation and participation of Roma themselves is vital for the success of both local projects and wider action at the EU level. Civil society must also be central to this process.
- The empowerment of the Roma through greater representation at local, regional, national and EU level is absolutely essential.
- Concrete measures must be taken to ensure that projects financed by the EU do not themselves lead to greater segregation. Equal access and non-discrimination must be guaranteed.
- More accurate information about the socio-economic situation of Roma communities is vital for the setting of targets and monitoring the effectiveness of new initiatives.
- The European Commission and the member states should launch more target- and development-oriented, complex, flexible and sustainable programmes with a longer time coverage and greater territorial relevance.
- There is a need for new regulations on the allocation of the Structural Funds to set conditionality concerning the elimination of segregation and the assurance of equal access of the Roma to public services.
- The Commission should change the regulatory framework of cross-financing, decrease bureaucratic burdens, simplify and accelerate procedures for EU funds, and also require member states to introduce simple and normative funding procedures and utilise Global Grants.
- Benchmarks, indicators, independent monitoring and impact assessment mechanisms have to be developed to support and evaluate the efficiency and the tangible results of the programmes rather than purely checking that projects in receipt of grants have met the procedural formalities.

- Effective monitoring of the use of funds is needed so that the financial resources genuinely end up improving the living conditions, health care, education and employment of the Roma.



*Life starts at school. Slovakia, 2010*



*Housing, a big issue. Slovakia, 2010*



*Access to technology. Slovakia, 2010*



*Monor. Hungary, 2010*



*The youth is the future. Hungary, 2010*



*Feeding the doves. Hungary, 2010*



*Europe is built here. Hungary, 2010*

# **Exclusion and Discrimination**



# Inclusion of the Roma: Europe's Joint Responsibility



Gábor Daróczi

The four pillars of the Roma Integration Decade Programme launched five years ago (education, employment, health care, housing) embrace the main topics that affect the Roma today, but two horizontal issues – anti-discrimination and cultural identity – were left out. Both experts in the field and the general public maintain that the emancipation process should be a fundamental and integral part of the inclusion of the Roma in society, a process that involves creating a European environment that will allow the Roma to represent their own interests within a given country or even across Europe. The road to achieving this is certainly a long and bumpy one, but all stakeholders agree that the only feasible option is to create an efficient and successful education environment.

Of course, this undoubtedly requires the availability of health-care, education and social systems right from birth, auxiliary services ensuring access to these systems, and civil organisations and networks to run them, which operate without discrimination and with the purpose of ensuring genuine equal opportunities.

In connection with programmes aimed at the Roma, the question is often raised as to who the Roma are and, more importantly, on what basis somebody can be considered Roma. Unfortunately, this issue formulated in this way has dominated both Hungarian and international public opinion for almost 50 years. With exclusion steadily spreading and people's ethnic roots being clear for all to see in everyday situations (for example committees mostly sending Roma children to remedial schools, security guards excluding the Roma from places of entertainment, and



administrators not hiring those with darker skin for any type of work), this artificial dilemma is frequently the reason why programmes are not launched. In other words, while it is clear to everyone in everyday life who the Roma are, difficulties cited in identifying them are why programmes targeting their inclusion often do not get off the ground.

Years ago some serious attempts were made to create legislation to cut through the Gordian knot of the dilemma: to measure hardship not by ethnic affiliation but by the objective poverty of the family (right to regular child protection allowance) and also by the lack of social-knowledge-mobility capital (parents having attended school for no more than eight years). This defined the Roma quite accurately, whilst also ensuring that other citizens living under similar social conditions (many of whom were also living in slums or even on Roma settlements) were reached as well. However, according to education leaders' current plans, this definition would be significantly diluted on the one hand, and elements completely independent of this logic would be added on the other.

In addition to all this, the European Union has to face up to the fact that Europe has so far failed to take the measures which would help to gain an accurate, reliable and up-to-date picture of the Roma. Until the recent regrettable events in Italy and France there was no pan-European initiative taking a serious look and examining the situation of the Roma and – more importantly – striving to identify solutions. It is crucial to emphasise here that Europe has the means and the opportunities to step beyond the sham dilemmas and take genuine, significant and effective action to promote the social inclusion of the Roma.

Hungary is one of the few countries which, according to international public opinion, devotes more attention to Roma living within its borders than the average; where – at least according to the State Audit Office – billions have been spent on the Roma in the last two decades; which can present internationally recognised programmes and initiatives; where domestic talent shows regularly discover young talented Roma; and which is the only

country in Europe to maintain a minority local government system – even though it is heavily criticised by many.

Without examining the precise details and the truths behind these statements, it is important to say that, regardless of all this, Hungary is also the country where a few killers terrorised an entire ethnic group for a good year; where – as an interesting aside to Hungarian reality – with the exception of a few Roma, nobody has ever been sentenced for persecution or violence against an ethnic group; where a few years ago the ratio of children considered disabled was almost three times the EU average, and one in every five Roma children was sent to a remedial school; and which is clearly one of the worst performers in terms of equal opportunities in the education system by comparison with other OECD countries. Thus we can categorically say that Hungary is a country of extremes when it comes to the Roma.

To top it all, Hungary has taken on the rotating Presidency of the EU, and its key areas include preparing a European Roma Strategy, which the Hungarian Government has purposely and clearly designated as one of its main priorities.

Events in Hungary over the last few years have evidently shown that the social inclusion of the Roma has at least lost some momentum, but we could also say it never actually got going in some areas. In Hungary today the dubious status of segregated schools is being taken over by segregated communities, while education policymakers – to put it nicely – are ambivalent with regard to both the integration efforts of previous governments and the prevailing European norms in this field.

If Europe and its member states would like to recover from their present situations, then in view of the levels of social exclusion there is a need for the interests of the Roma to be represented not by self-made business people, or by members of political parties in particular, but by well-prepared, intelligent Roma speaking European languages and playing an active role in their communities (as the member states committed to in 2010 during the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion). This would typically be a group of young people capable

of injecting new momentum into the European Roma movement, which has been faltering for decades. Of course, this requires programmes at Member State level which are not only good and effective in their own right, but also suitable to be integrated at European level and strengthen mutual synergies.

Although the Romaversitas Foundation operates only in a very small portion of the afore-mentioned areas, we have nevertheless succeeded over the last 14 years in setting young people on the right track who have not only gone on to achieve professional success but have also preserved their identity. Moreover, many occupy positions that involve dealing with the integration and inclusion of the Roma in society. Despite all these positive aspects the results achieved are few and far between. A foundation working with the support of private individuals and small businesses as well as funds awarded in tenders can help around a dozen talented young Roma to acquire their diplomas every year. In spite of the varying levels and standards of work put in by every government over the last 20 years, the number of young Roma graduates has yet to reach a critical mass that would trigger the launch of significant changes owing to the sheer number alone; and, as yet, there is no strong network of Roma graduates based on personal contacts, joint experiences, similar values and, naturally, a common identity.

Civil organisations in Hungary similar to Romaversitas tend to be trapped in a constant cycle of facing closure, just surviving, or pressing forward with the current funding they have. This is particularly true when they do not want to abandon their professional independence and the careful distance they maintain from politics. The EU aid programmes of past years (PHARE, Access, Structural Funds) have shown in turn that small Roma civil organisations – i.e. those with no capital, which do not carry out eligible activities for state subsidies and which do not belong to a church or some larger organisation distributing funds – are very rarely able to structure their operations in such a way that they fall under the scope of activities eligible for EU funding. This is true even if the mission statement and vision of a given Roma organisation fits in perfectly with the objectives set forth in the various documents sent to EU bodies (National Development



*No media, no attention. Romania, 2011*

Plan, Operational Programmes) and the set assistance objectives of the EU community. What happens is that while the large-scale plans and objectives make space for the goals (i.e. support) of organisations involved in facilitating the inclusion of the Roma, these are then omitted from the specific tenders (created at national level), or are linked to terms and conditions which make it impossible to support the original target group.

We could be kind and attribute this process to the bureaucratic functioning of the tendering system, during which the original objectives and values are often lost along the way. But a less benevolent explanation is that the inclusion of the Roma is only important in speeches, and that realisation as well as actual development and the placement of funds are not a political interest – regardless of party allegiance. What is even more important is that the programmes with their various objectives often compete with one another: if a community has a limited amount of financial, tender-writing, implementation, etc. resources and can freely decide between a tender for putting down decorative paving on the main square or for improving the

Roma settlement, then in many cases it will opt for the simpler and more visible task that is preferred by the majority of the electorate. Neither in Hungary nor elsewhere will you find any coercive power to force local or national decision-makers to do anything about the problems surrounding the Roma population. The policy supporting the principle of equal opportunity focusing on the planning practices of local governments and designed to make them accountable for results has slowly lost momentum after a few years, while the intentions of the current policies are unclear.

Despite European institutions using detailed surveys at the end of each year to assess how much EU funding used in a given Member State has been spent on the Roma, no Member State has yet come up with a system for tracking the services provided to Roma stakeholders on a voluntary declaration basis. The situation only gets worse if we consider that no tenders designed to preserve cultural identity have been announced in Hungary over the last five years where the target group has explicitly been the Roma.

One refreshing exception in this failed tendering system is the Norwegian Civil Fund and the Swiss Fund, whose objectives are obviously largely consistent with EU assistance, but they are much more effective given the methods used for spending funds, the preference given to partnerships, and the time and money spent on monitoring as opposed to controls (thanks to changes introduced following the teething troubles with operations). The criticism is often voiced that private and Hungarian budgetary funds should not be spent on Roma issues in a country where almost HUF 8 billion in EU funding is spent on development over seven years, since there should be ample resources here to finance Roma issues as well. While it would be difficult to cast doubt on the veracity of this statement, we should not forget that the complexity of both the tendering mechanisms (level of bureaucracy, sluggish contracting process, delays in payment of funds, unequal competition in tendering processes, etc.) and defining the target group (tenders are not published for the Roma because it is difficult to determine who the Roma are, and often

just the small sizes of communities result in disqualification from the outset, i.e. typically those in the worst situation cannot apply etc.) results in the amounts spent from the Structural Funds slowly but surely widening the differences between the Roma and other Hungarians, between the poorest and the middle class.<sup>1</sup>

EU institutions are undoubtedly working on spending taxpayers' Euros in the most efficient way possible. In order for this to happen they have to re-think their approach whereby the current organisational and bureaucratic system gives completely free rein to member states in certain issues (the Roma, the disabled, the homeless, poverty) so that, for example, they trigger an effect that runs counter to one of the founding principles of the EU, cohesion (i.e. they widen differences instead of promoting cohesion), or they do nothing of note. The events in France and Italy demonstrated that the European Commissioners and the entire EU bureaucracy are unsure how to respond to the international Roma situation. The responses to individual incidents (or more precisely often the lack thereof) were temperamental rather than purely professional in nature, or diverse but unified manifestations of a single European opinion. And the slow and protracted response of the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion – deemed most competent in terms of the Roma issue – made it clear to Roma throughout Europe that the EU was not sufficiently united or organised to express a firm and unyielding opinion in the event of such a serious violation. The events to date that have attracted international attention clearly show that there are areas within EU bureaucracy where the lack of coordination and contingency plans for crisis situations give rise to uncertainty that could even shake the foundations of the faith placed in the spirit of the EU.

The Roma people and the international Roma issue have played the role of blue touchpaper on more than one occasion throughout history. But now, for the first time, Europe is facing a situation

<sup>1</sup>For research on this see: Gyerekesély Füzetek 5. Fejlesztési támogatások hátrányos helyzetű településeken (Development aid in disadvantaged communities).

where reality and everyday life are testing the principles on which the EU was founded. To make matters worse for the Roma, Hungary does not have a government that is proficient in asserting interests, or an international lobbying organisation, nor can we influence the international markets.

The EU Roma Policy Framework coordinated by the Hungarian EU Presidency will probably help to dispel the legitimate and very real concerns, which – presumably – will give guidance first and foremost to the governments of the member states. However, this will have no immediate and practical impact on specific activities within EU bureaucracy, nor can it, despite the fact that there is definitely a need here – i.e. for a unit at EU level focusing on Roma affairs; a conflict map for Roma affairs; or a group of programmes coordinated from Brussels that is capable of radically changing the situation of the Roma.

In terms of the EU, these recommendations are essentially free since in practically every field there are already mainstream programmes and funds, and, if these were re-thought or re-designed, or if sub-programmes were established, and most importantly with the help of efficient central leadership, spectacular results could be achieved quickly and easily.

If the EU still believes that the principles laid down in the Lisbon criteria are valid, and also considers them important in the context of the Agenda 2020 framework, then it cannot sit back, as in previous years, and fail to engage with the dilemmas that have arisen in connection with the Roma.

As European citizens we all have to recognise:

- that the situation of the Roma plays a significant role – both directly and indirectly – in conflicts across the whole of Europe;
- that effective change cannot be brought about with the current OMC (Open Method of Coordination) methodology and the often dubious value of “best practices”; on a completely voluntary basis there is barely anyone willing to take on a major role in the inclusion of the Roma;

- that by accepting artificial dilemmas (who are the Roma?) we help to maintain bad attitudes, putting off the real measures and laying the foundations for new conflicts and crises;
- that the majority of the ageing and increasingly less competitive population in the European Union still only sees the problem instead of recognising the potential labour and taxpayers in the current Roma population that account for an increasingly large proportion of the young generations;
- but mostly that these are the last years when proper solutions can be found, albeit with significant sacrifices but without genuine ethnic conflicts.

Specific recommendations for EU bodies and the creators of the EU Roma Strategy Framework:

- The European Commission should call upon the member states to ensure that programmes targeting the catch-up and inclusion of the Roma are carried out effectively and efficiently, for example institutional development providing more scope for Roma culture, support for civil networks operating an anti-discrimination warning system and legal aid services, and the provision of services supporting successful careers among the multiply disadvantaged and Roma children.
- The European Commission should ensure that European-level tenders are launched in certain areas, for example establishing, within existing programmes supporting education (Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo, Grundtvig), or rather alongside them, a European sub-programme (called Gandhi, for instance) to give new impetus to efforts to create a Roma middle class.
- The European Commission should draft compulsory opinions which stipulate how Member State and EU decision-makers should properly involve Roma stakeholders – not just when designing development programmes that target the Roma, but also for mainstream programmes – and how they should evaluate the inclusion results and impacts of these programmes.



- The European Commission should take specific measures to have up-to-date information on the situations of Roma living in the EU and in the given countries:
  - based on mutual interests, persuade the large international opinion leaders (WHO, ILO, OECD, etc.) to devote a chapter to the Roma in their mainstream research that already appears regularly;
  - based on either an existing or a new body, operate an international rapid-reaction analysis group tasked with presenting the problem areas of the European Roma population in a credible but above all comprehensible manner, independent of local and national politics, and in so doing give advance warning of potential crises and conflicts in which the EU has an interest and which it is responsible for preventing.
- Within the European Commission and directly under the President an organisational unit should be created to act in relation to overlapping or adjoining Roma issues, to express opinions, represent interests, prepare and propose decisions and, if necessary, coordinate between the given Commissioners.

# Why “Fixing” the Roma is the Wrong Approach



Valeriu Nicolae

The spectacular failure of the social inclusion of Roma in Europe is a direct result of measures taken to address their exclusion. The last twenty years prove that both member states and EU institutions are unwilling, and sometimes incapable, of designing or implementing measures to bring about change to the increasing alienation and exclusion of Roma citizens.

The main approach taken so far is fundamentally wrong as all the focus has been on fixing the Roma through disjointed, small and unsustainable projects. The failure to acknowledge and address anti-Gypsyism, grassroots empowerment and the overall European fiasco to stimulate active citizenship of both Roma and non-Roma citizens are the main reasons for the current situation. Roma are perceived as foreigners and are often demonised and dehumanised by individuals, media, politicians and opinion makers both in their countries and in Europe. Successful Roma continue to be treated as exceptions and dismissed as irrelevant both by media and the public. This is the main reason why their inclusion is difficult and sometimes impossible.

In 1941 two American sociologists Richard C Fuller and Richard R Mayers argued that in order to solve a social problem governments need to go through three stages: awareness, policy determination and reform. In what follows I argue that there are significant problems with all those stages when it comes to Roma.

## **Wrong awareness – wrong focus**

Awareness of the problem is the first step in addressing it effectively. When it comes to Roma there are many reasons why there is either false, or not enough, awareness of the main issues at stake.

European societies regard the life style of Roma as a deviation from the established/expected social norms of those living in Europe. The integrated Roma remain invisible and are either perceived as, or pretend, they are non-Roma. It is futile in the opinion of the majority politicians and decision makers to argue against what is overall a false perception as long as the majority population thinks this is the case. The “popular view” is taken very seriously by those who are elected or named in their position following elections. The same view is easily adopted by bureaucrats with superficial or no experience in Roma issues and, as a consequence, the deviance of Roma becomes the social problem which needs to be solved.

Anti-Gypsyism is considered a problem by only a small number of academics, human rights activists and some specialized bodies which are barely influential within their own intergovernmental institutions. Racism against Roma is not a deviation from what is considered ordinariness in Europe but is rather the accepted normality. Sarkozy, Lellouche, Fratini, Băsescu, and Mečiar are just some of the numerous top European politicians who have used anti-Gypsyism as a way to boost their popularity. Opinion polls and research focused on racism in mass media prove without doubt that anti-Gypsyism is by far much more cherished than fought against in the EU.

The rights and responsibilities of citizens in an increasingly multiethnic and multicultural Europe remain biased or are at the very best ambiguous. The concept of active citizenship is vague in most parts of the EU and has never been clearly linked to anti-discrimination and equality. A significant number of Roma are not or do not see or consider themselves as equal citizens and, unfortunately, there are still many who act as non-citizens.

The social inclusion of Roma is impossible as long as both member states and the EU do not recognise anti-Gypsyism as a social problem and start to tackle it seriously. A solution for effective inclusion is to stimulate grassroots empowerment and active citizenship, but the latter concept remains ambiguous in a Europe struggling to find its identity.

## **Policy Determination – Fix or get rid of the Roma**

There is no other policy determination besides the one targeted to fix or get rid of us – the defective Roma. Existing political ideas, populism, budget constraints, incapability of Roma to increase pressure on their national political class, incompetence, and the lack of expertise and vision from decision makers all contribute to the existing wrong policy determination. The steady decline in interest and support for centre or left wing ideas and politicians both at the EU and member states level, corruption, short electoral cycles, and the economic crisis are all reasons for political support of racist measures rather than policies focused towards social inclusion.

As with any social inclusion process, the success in the case of Roma is directly linked to the budgets dedicated to solve the issues. The overall perception in most of the EU member states with a significant number of Roma is that huge amounts of money were spent to address their situation. In reality, investments to improve the life of Roma – the most despised ethnic group in Europe – were minor even for window dressing measures and are deemed as impossible by the leading politicians nowadays. The economic crisis and domination of right wing “profit only”-oriented ideas in most of the member states make any policy targeting the welfare of minorities a categorical no-go for the majority of the European political elites.

The heterogeneity, lack of experience in dealing with elections or advancing their interests in newly created nationalistic democracies in Central and Eastern Europe make Roma almost irrelevant in elections. Infighting, incompetency and corruption of their representatives are some other serious reasons for the

existing situation. Incapability to produce enough votes makes issues linked to the improvement of Roma's socio-economical situation to be at maximum a very marginal topic within the governmental plans.

For the last twenty years there have been no Roma or Roma experts playing significant (if any) roles in designing and implementing decision-making processes related to Roma inclusion approaches. The most vocal institutions promoting the principle of participation of Roma and Roma experts were, and continue to be, the most exclusive when it comes to the employment of Roma. The European Institutions, the UN, Council of Europe, OSCE, and the World Bank are the most vocal in promoting the rights of Roma. For most of the last 20 years none of those institutions employed any Roma and at this moment the Roma continue to be by far the most excluded European ethnic group from all these institutions. Institutional exclusion of Roma remains a de-facto rule when it comes to inter-governmental and international institutions.

A similar situation can be found at the level of member states. In the exceptionally rare cases where Roma or Roma experts are or were employed in positions of relative power within National Governments their appointment has been mainly politically motivated and rarely had anything to do with professional competences. Roma organisations as well as Roma experts continue to have limited and often no impact at the decision-making level, be that at the international, European, national, regional or local level.

### **Wrong reforms – wrong results**

The problem is not just that there are not enough good ideas, political will, efforts or money put into the social inclusion but that most of what has been done starts from the wrong premises – that Roma need fixing and we know how to do it. The reforms come up just in a moment of crisis and are often both contradictory and incoherent as there is no understanding of the situation nor long-term strategy, framework or mechanisms to achieve social inclusion.

The existing European-wide “mainstreaming” approach is ambiguous and flawed as there is no clear strategy on how Roma inclusion can be achieved. This leads mainly to reactions in a time of crisis correlated with long periods of non-action on the part of governments, which prefer to contract Roma organisations to do their job. The existing Roma specific governmental structures (see the National Agency for Roma in Romania and the Plenipotentiary Office for Roma in Slovakia) have been in general denied any serious access to decision making and are used mainly to hide the lacklustre actions and motivations of the governments.

The only evaluation of Roma projects, published by the European Commission in 2005, is still valid 6 years later. It wrote: “Overall, the activities [Projects] have been piecemeal and have relied on long-established practices such as vocational education and training, supported short-term employment, and public work projects with little attempt to ensure that the methodologies meet the needs of the target group.”

The situation at this moment is paradoxical. Instead of Roma NGOs and Roma experts helping to design, monitor and assess the implementation of policies or national strategies for Roma, they are in charge of implementing disjointed service-oriented projects within some frameworks designed, monitored and supervised by people with limited or no Roma expertise from within the European Commission and national governments’ bodies.

These practices lead to an almost complete “ghettoisation” of the work on Roma issues outside the governments, as the implementation has been handed over to small Roma NGOs and resulted in very limited or no sustainable achievements. Moreover, this approach leaves Roma NGOs vulnerable to attacks from their own communities, and absolves national governments of responsibility for the failure of their social inclusion programmes focused on Roma.

EU projects offer contracts of up to 10 times higher salary levels than previous lines of funding. This has led to a dangerous dependency. Roma NGOs must seek EU project funding in order to pay staff adequately and to continue functioning.

Structural funds are distributed through national government bodies which have significant leverage over the way projects are implemented. It is understandable that the national governments would not want to encourage critical voices against themselves, and most of them are known for actively discouraging criticism, especially when it comes to Roma.

The result is an effective curb of Romani organisations' criticism towards both the European Commission and national governments, and submissive attitudes on the part of the Romani NGOs. Practically all the main national NGOs in Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Spain (the EU countries with the largest Roma populations) are, or were, involved in European Commission funded projects and the majority of them depend on those.

Another result is significant tensions between NGO elites that are paid very well and the targeted communities of which most live in abject poverty. There are many cases when NGOs dealing with Roma issues were accused of stealing money meant to be received by the Communities. The existing approach leads to a failure in stimulating responsibilities linked to citizenship of the most excluded Roma and to a dangerous strengthening of the majority opinion that Roma are not worth to be treated as citizens.

### **Expanding positive practices – good idea – bad results**

The existing EU monitoring and assessment mechanisms are too diplomatic and tend to focus almost exclusively on positive practices. This tendency translates in practical terms into discouragement of constructive criticism or objective reporting on failed practices. The focus on positive practices often backfires as most governments or implementing organisations will present exaggerated positive reports or positive reports of totally or partially failed projects. Such practices lead to further financing, a cycle that clearly discourages constructive, but critical, analysis of failures. This leads to a repetition of mistakes and becomes an inefficient way of using EU or national money.

Up to this moment there is not even one case study of the European Commission or member states which has focused on

assessing failed projects. This is exceptional as there is an overall agreement among main stakeholders that the majority of the interventions targeting social inclusion of Roma produced lower than expected results.

The overall result at this moment is a balloon effect – the reporting of Roma NGOs present more and more positive practices and achievements on paper while at the level of Roma communities these results are considerable less visible and sometimes minimal or non-existent.

### **Weak academic interest**

A major cause of the failure in improving the Roma situation is the lack of data and comprehensive research. Many interventions and strategies are not evidence-based. This contributes significantly to the perpetuation of existing prejudices and to blame the victims' approach. One of the most relevant examples is early marriage which is considered an important cause of school drop-out in Romania. According to a recent research in most poor Roma communities this is only the case for 4% of the Roma.

Paradoxically, there is a strong emphasis on education, both in policies and amount of money invested. The focus is on pre-school and primary education. It has never been proved that improving education at this level has led to major developments of a nation/group. On the contrary, improvement of the economic situation has determined a qualitative and inclusive education.

### **Conclusions**

The way Roma inclusion is addressed at this moment is fundamentally wrong. What is perceived as the main Roma social problem is the deviance of Roma while essential problems are disregarded or treated superficially. The failure to address anti-Gypsyism and the lack of grassroots empowerment and responsible citizenship among Roma and majority populations at both Member State and European level are the main reasons for the existing situation. Neither anti-Gypsyism, nor the lack of active citizenship is accepted as a significant social problem. The main



focus of the approach taken by the EU and its member states to social inclusion is on “fixing” the Roma and their life-style through projects targeting their education, housing, health care, employment, and business development. All these actions are indeed well intentioned but have been proved both ineffective and paternalistic in similar situations in the US, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. Solutions do exist but they continue to be ignored as experts’ opinion is lost in a cacophony of empty rhetoric about eliminating discrimination and racist speeches focused on Roma criminality.

## Recommendations

- A serious overhaul of the way in which the European Commission addresses Roma issues in order to force a similar change at the level of national governments.
- A long-term European Roma Inclusion Strategy with the main short and medium term priorities focused on curbing anti-Gypsyism and stimulating active citizenship needs to be completed by dedicated, well-budgeted, and well-staffed institutional mechanisms both at the EU and member states’ level. Budget lines through both EU and national funding, targets, indicators and timeframes need to be attached to each of the identified priorities. A clear division of tasks as well as monitoring mechanisms need to be put in place.
- Grassroots development, as well as ways to ensure the healthy development of Roma civil society as a part of the mainstream civil society, need to become priorities for next lines of European funding.
- A long term strategy and budget line focused on building human resources within Roma communities. Encourage/request EU member states to come up with concrete incentive measures as recommended by the Race Directive, among the EU and national governments’ contractors.
- Encourage critical evaluations within the process and reform the Open Method of Coordination.

- Ensure that Roma are clearly mentioned and targeted through all the relevant flagship initiatives of the EU2020 strategy.
- Increased financial support for research of Roma communities and for think tanks focused on minority/Roma issues.



# Roma Inclusion and Discrimination<sup>1</sup>



Eva Sobotka

## Introduction

The European Union has expressed its commitment to work towards full inclusion of Roma through implementing policies to defend fundamental rights, uphold gender equality, combat discrimination, poverty and social exclusion and ensure access to education, housing, health and employment, social services, justice, sports and culture.<sup>2</sup> Efforts of EU member states, in particular those joining in 2004 and 2007, to improve the situation of Roma in a number of key social areas started long before their accession to the European Union.<sup>3</sup> Particularly as the improvement of the situation of Roma was an important part of EU enlargement policy. EU membership, in the field of human rights protection, primarily guided by the 1993 Copenhagen criteria, applied vis-à-vis future EU members, became a factor for improving the human rights situation of Roma. Political conditionality of membership and material help based on the Copenhagen Criteria adopted by the European Council at the 1993 June EU summit, have been factors that proved crucial to the EU's ability to exercise its influence on Roma policy externally.

Today, the situation of Roma is a political priority addressed by internal EU mainstream and targeted policies and subjected to regular data collection, research and human rights monitoring

<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed in this article are the views of the author and not necessarily the view of the FRA. I would like to thank my colleagues John Kellock, Ioannis Dimitrakopoulos, Michail Beis and Martin Botta for very helpful comments on earlier drafts of the article.

<sup>2</sup> Council of the European Union, Conclusions, 8 June 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Improving the tools for the social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma in the EU, p. 11 available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=518>

both at national and European level. In this context the European Council adopted specific criteria, *Ten Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion*, which should be taken into account in formulating initiatives to further Roma inclusion. Still, considering the high level of discrimination and lack of inclusion of many Roma in EU member states, which is well documented through the FRA's data collection and the work of other human rights organisations, what does effective inclusion of Roma and respect for fundamental rights require? How can we move to a next level of engagement, leading to lower levels of discrimination and an increased sense of “belonging” and inclusion?

## Current situation

The social inclusion of many Roma and the respect and fulfilment of their fundamental rights remain an important issue in the EU. Despite a number of policy efforts and the strengthening of the human rights framework within the EU, a number of diverse factors including high levels of racism and discrimination, but also the political and economic climate, the lack of a “positive visibility” of Roma within society, the lack of engagement with and between the majority population and Roma as solution drivers continue to influence negatively the situation of Roma.

The FRA's EU-wide survey on minorities' experiences of discrimination, EU-MIDIS, revealed a bleak picture for the estimated 10-12 million Roma in the EU. It showed that Roma experience the highest overall levels of discrimination across all areas surveyed:<sup>4</sup> 66-92% of Roma (depending on the country) did not report their most recent experience of discrimination to any competent authority; 65-100% of the Roma respondents reported lack of confidence in law enforcement and justice structures.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> EU-MIDIS asked the respondents about discrimination they had experienced, in the past 12 months or in the past 5 years, in nine areas: 1) when looking for work; 2) at work; 3) when looking for a house or an apartment to rent or buy; 4) by health-care personnel; 5) by social service personnel; 6) by school personnel 7) at a café, restaurant or bar; 8) when entering or in a shop; 9) when trying to open a bank account or get a loan

<sup>5</sup> Roma: Data in Focus report, EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, available at: [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/EU-MIDIS\\_ROMA\\_EN.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/EU-MIDIS_ROMA_EN.pdf)

Another FRA report on the impact of the Racial Equality Directive documented that in some member states both employer organisations and trade unions often did not acknowledge discrimination against Roma as racial discrimination.<sup>6</sup> At the same time redress mechanisms, such as Equality Bodies, mandated to intervene in cases of discrimination and provide help to victims, are little known, and often not sufficiently resourced: 80% of all EU-MIDIS respondents could not think of a single organisation that could offer support to victims of discrimination – be this government-based, an independent institution or authority, such as an Equality Body, or an NGO.<sup>7</sup>

Following on the adoption of Council conclusions in 2007, highlighting the very specific situation faced by the Roma across the EU, the issue of the Roma has acquired a special political relevance on the European agenda. Responding to the political guidelines expressed in the Council Conclusions, the European Commission issued in 2010 a Communication (COM/2010/0133 final) on: “The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe” and a Commission Staff Working Document “Roma in Europe: The Implementation of European Union Instruments and Policies for Roma Inclusion – Progress Report 2008-2010”, which took up many of the issues already identified in the Commission Report on Roma social inclusion (July 2008), European Parliament Resolutions, the opinions of the FRA, and of other international organizations and institutions working on Roma. This Commission Communication was a first attempt to operationalise the *Common Basic Principles of Roma Inclusion*.<sup>8</sup> More

<sup>6</sup> See The impact of the Racial Equality Directive – Views of trade unions and employers in the European Union available at: [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Racial-equality-directive\\_conf-ed\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Racial-equality-directive_conf-ed_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> See [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Racial-equality-directive\\_conf-ed\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Racial-equality-directive_conf-ed_en.pdf)

See Data in Focus Report: Rights Awareness and Equality Bodies: [http://www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/EU-MIDIS\\_RIGHTS\\_AWARENESS\\_EN.PDF](http://www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/EU-MIDIS_RIGHTS_AWARENESS_EN.PDF)

<sup>8</sup> Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Non-discrimination and equal opportunities: A renewed commitment. Community Instruments Policies for Roma Inclusion. COM(2008) 420. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=en&eventsId=105&furtherEvents=yes>

importantly, the Communication identified that the key to the success of the Structural Funds is political will and capacity of Member State Governments to allocate budgets and support projects which are multidimensional (taking the whole reality of Roma life into consideration) and clearly targeted at the Roma (though not ethnically exclusive, *i.e.*, allowing for participation of other persons in similar situations regardless of their ethnicity). The Communication notes that this should be the case for action by European institutions, national, regional and local governments, as well as civil society and private business. On 19 May 2010, the Parliament and the Council adopted the Regulation (EU) No 437/2010 amending Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 on European Regional Development allowing the extension of financial support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for housing interventions for extremely poor and marginalised communities, including many Roma communities.<sup>9</sup> The new Regulation extends housing interventions eligible for ERDF support to the renovation of houses in rural areas and to the replacement of houses, irrespective of the area, urban or rural.

In September 2010, the European Commission further established a Roma Task Force to review the impact of Structural Funds on the situation of Roma and to propose systemic changes that could increase the impact of the Structural Funds to improve Roma inclusion.

New institutional mechanisms were set up in 2009, such as the Integrated Roma Platform, with an objective to bring together a variety of actors on Roma, including civil society organisations to discuss thematic issues, prioritised in a Roma Inclusion Road map, adopted during the Spanish Presidency of the EU in 2010.<sup>10</sup> The Roma Summits, which bring together all relevant

<sup>9</sup> Council Regulation (EU) No 437/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 amending Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 on the European Regional Development Fund as regards the eligibility of housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:132:0001:0002:EN:PDF>.

<sup>10</sup> Roma Inclusion Road map is available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=849>

stakeholders, have had the ambition to increase political attention to the situation of Roma EU-wide, drawing in, in particular, high level national policy makers.

Following these institutional developments and policy decisions at the EU level, action in the area of addressing discrimination and improving social inclusion now needs to follow, in particular at the national and local level. Policy makers, organisations and individuals, Roma and non-Roma, have already started to raise questions about the impact and effectiveness of policy measures in place at national level: Are actions combating discrimination designed to address deeply rooted anti-Romani prejudice, also called *anti-Gypsyism*? Are Roma inclusion projects and programmes sustainable? Are they sufficiently linked to the integration policy frameworks, which are in place in a number of EU member states? In order to improve the efforts made, the *Ten Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion* provide a useful reference framework for guiding policy makers in adapting their policies when addressing the situation of Roma.

## Options at hand

The EU member states are faced with an important task: to optimise or put in place adequate policies, to resource these policies sufficiently, and to implement and monitor their impact effectively. The optimal policies are evidently those based on multi-sectoral and integrated approaches, and target Roma explicitly, but not exclusively; these must be accompanied by targeted policies to address overall discrimination and exclusion. Given the recognition that long-term exclusive targeting of Roma through specific policies can lead to further exclusion, it is important in the upcoming period to shift to a concept of inclusive/integrated societies rather than exclusively focusing on specific groups. Such policy consideration will require strong coordination across relevant ministries, as well as vertical coordination across variety of levels of governance: European, national and, in particular, local. The effective participation of Roma in the design, implementation and impact assessment of such policies with specific attention to the role of Romani women,



children and young people should be part of any relevant policies, which should be based on a multi-sectoral approach firmly based on the principle of equality and non-discrimination fully respecting fundamental rights.

The assessment of the impact of policies, promoting dialogue within society, should be taken up, in particular by local authorities and engage the Roma thereby promoting their empowerment and effective participation. Furthermore, policy makers need not only statistical data, but key qualitative contextual information to enable them to design “tailor-made” responses to the particular local needs; such contextual information would enhance understanding of the variety of Romani communities and allow for example “deliberative engagement” in local communities with Roma and non-Roma in order to collect their views, experiences and opinions. Such engagement building on the feedback provided by local populations could significantly contribute to improving social inclusion: accepting Roma as neighbours, maintaining Roma children in desegregated local schools, employing Roma or providing Roma with services on an equal footing and in a respectful manner; for the success of such social inclusion goals the attitudes and behaviour of non-Roma will be a decisive factor.

## Lessons learned

In conclusion the following elements are crucial for the successful implementation of a Roma inclusion policy:

- As experience has shown, successful anti-discrimination and equality actions need to focus on the **local level** and foster a broad sense of belonging. This will benefit not only the Roma, but the entire community.
- Cooperation between public bodies, NGOs and the private sector together with a strong participation of Roma are essential elements for improving their access to employment, their achievement in school, their equitable access to local health services, and to housing opportunities.



*Block 67. Belgrade, 2010*

- Political will, but also political courage, will enhance the impact of the efforts of policy makers both locally, nationally and EU wide.
- Roma and non-Roma need to be engaged in dialogue on how to achieve better inclusion, as the majority population has a decisive influence on the success of Roma inclusion efforts and therefore their views must also be taken fully into account.

There is sometimes a tendency to address the problems that Roma face as security rather than human rights and social inclusion issues. Roma, like non-Roma, face a variety of challenges related to the behaviour of individuals in their communities, it must therefore be stressed that generalisations about “Roma” behaviour and stereotyping of Roma cannot and should not be used as a pretext for not respecting their individual fundamental rights. In this context, stronger awareness raising efforts by different actors is necessary to draw attention to the human rights aspects of the situation of Roma. At the same time the image of Roma as the perpetual victims of human rights

violations is also counterproductive and does not reflect the variety of Roma's social positions. Real-life success stories of Roma people slowly emerge, also as a result of past twenty years effort in promoting good practice on Roma inclusion/integration and strengthening human rights approaches to social inclusion policy. These would be important stories to share across board, and pursue dialogue with majority populations.

## **Way forward**

- Operationalise the implementation of the “*Ten Common Basic Principles of Roma Inclusion*” in policy making.
- Adequately resource specialised bodies, such as Equality bodies and National Human Rights Institutions.
- Define indicators for Roma inclusion focusing on achieving “community cohesion” and equal and better life chances.
- Collect quantitative and qualitative data on discrimination and inclusion.
- Address human rights violations both against and within Romani communities.
- Engage with the wider community, Roma and non-Roma, to illustrate the benefits of inclusive communities with Roma as equal members of society.

# Towards an Active and Purposeful Confrontation of Cultures



Nazzareno Guarnieri

*Romanipé* stands for the identity and sense of belonging of a people – a timeless, placeless people with uncertain roots but a rich spirit (*bravalipé*), to be defended and to be made understood. Throughout their history, stretching back over a millennium, these people have been the victims of many injustices and sufferings. During their endless voyage in search of peace and a “friendly soil” to call “home”, they have become scattered all across the world. The first migrations took place very long ago; many generations separate the current Roma people from their forefathers, from those who had a kind of certainty about their origins and a land they could call their own – a homeland and a home.

All the Roma, Sinti, Manush, Kale and Romanichal – wherever they are and whatever kind of life they lead and as different as it may be from the life “gypsies” (a discriminatory term applied to them by the Gadje, or non-Roma) are expected to lead in the popular imagination – have one thing in common. They are a nation, even though they do not all live in the same state. They are bound by the *phralipé* (brotherhood), which like a large web envelops and binds together all the members of this family and who have a great sense of solidarity with one another.

Confusion about the Roma people, often created on purpose, makes it difficult to understand the reality and the needs of Europe's largest linguistic and ethnic minority – to the extent that many believe that this is a minority that cannot be integrated. Most people know very little – or almost nothing – about Romani culture. Policies to disseminate the Romani culture are either virtually non-existent or else have been influenced by folklore in

such a way that they confirm people's mental images and deny Romani cultural diversity. Reference is always made to poverty, crisis, discrimination and racism, but the active participation and evolution of the Romani culture is thwarted. Too many Roma people are locked into a vicious circle of poverty, inadequate education, unemployment, poor housing and poor health caused by ignorance, prejudice, racism and violence.

Efforts to address this situation should not only be aimed at equality, dignity and economic and social opportunities for all Roma people, but also at active participation of the Roma at all levels, particularly of Roma professionals and intellectuals, and at cultural policies in support of the evolution of Roma culture (multiculturalism).

It is widely documented that despite the deployment of substantial resources by the EU and often by individual member states, living conditions for the Roma people have not improved. This is due to poor policy decisions and the wrong solutions, and there is a specific reason for this: a lack of knowledge of the reality and needs of the Roma communities. A truly radical change of methods and political strategies compared with those used in the past is necessary, and the following, urgent solutions would contribute to this:

- Change the methods of accessing EU resources
- Define the active participation of the Roma at all levels
- Grant the Romani people the status of a linguistic minority
- Support quantitative and qualitative research on the Romani population
- Define sanctions to combat discrimination and racism

There are many good examples of integration of people from the Roma minority – more than one might expect – but what is meant by *integration* of the Roma community (which is often confused with *assimilation*) needs to be clarified. There have been many attempts at *forced assimilation* of the Romani population, which have taken different forms though all with the ultimate aim of destroying the Romani culture.

The term *integration*, in the social sciences, indicates a set of *social* and *cultural* processes that make an individual a member of a given society. Before writing about good examples of *cultural integration* of the Romani people, I should clarify what is meant by the concept of *cultural integration*. When it comes to the Roma people, the term *cultural integration* is all too often ambiguous in its meaning. It should be pointed out that a “*culture*” is a body of knowledge, consciousness and feelings that give a people identity. *The culture of a people*, which is never “self-referential”, is always undergoing osmosis with the daily lives of those people, and it is validated by knowledge, by comparison/confrontation with other cultures, and by its own *cultural evolution*. People breathe culture, they have to in order to continue living. Cultures, like cultural identity, are dynamic – they constantly change and evolve, and with them the peoples who make up those cultures.

When groups or individuals from different cultures live together in the same area and/or come into contact with one another, the following might happen:

- *Assimilation*: the abandonment of one’s own culture to adopt entirely the majority culture;
- *Integration*: keeping the cultural characteristics of one’s own culture while also adopting aspects of the majority culture;
- *Segregation*: the members of the majority culture do not want the minority culture to adopt the majority culture, but allow them to retain their own culture without having any contact with them;
- *Marginalisation (exclusion)*: the members of the majority culture do not want the minority culture to keep its own culture or to adopt the majority culture.

The *cultural integration* of the Roma people means to me that they *maintain their own culture and replace aspects of their original culture with aspects of the majority culture*, which assumes that there will be some cultural exchange and that cultural differences will be valued (multicultural strategy). In this scenario the active participation of the Roma and knowledge of Romani

culture are essential. However, if we analyse the policy choices of many EU member states with regard to the Roma people, we will, in general, either see an almost total absence of policies aimed at the cultural integration of the Roma or a worsening of their living conditions.

The main reason for this failure is cultural, caused by a “*distorted interpretation*” of Roma culture which, from 1500 onwards, was seen as a “*dubious and unpopular curiosity*” and that justified a *process of criminalisation and persecution* and the attempted destruction of the Roma culture. This intolerance reached its peak during the times of “*Enlightened despotism*” when attempts were made to make the Roma culture disappear in exchange for citizenship rights – an unsuccessful policy that caused sufferings tantamount to persecution. More recently, frenzied use has been made of the “*distorted interpretation*” of Roma culture when seeking *solutions* that have actually tended to be *self-seeking*, without evaluating their negative impact on the Romani people and the land. There are many obvious examples of this.

Ignoring the failures of the past, many EU member states have again opted for a utilitarian “*distorted interpretation*” of the Romani culture (the language, nomadic life, social structure, etc.), blocking the possibility of the Romani culture evolving by establishing an unsavoury culture of dependency and thwarting the active participation of professionals from the Roma, Sinti, Manush, Kale and Romanichal (the five Romani groups).

### **The responsibility of politics?**

Not only is politics responsible, but so is anyone who has used “*distorted interpretations*” of the Roma culture to promote and implement “*differentiated policies*” of segregation and marginalisation for the Roma communities (travellers’ camps, education, etc.), forcing many Roma people to undergo a silent forced “*cultural assimilation*” and ignoring any form of *cultural integration policy* that would allow the evolution of Romani culture.



*Interior. Belgrade, 2010*

The “*distorted interpretation*” of Romani culture and the presence of “*cultural filters*” threaten to generate a “*denial*” of Romani cultural diversity or even its “*radicalisation*” – cutting off the political and cultural “*dynamism*” which is so essential to be able to value and appreciate the different cultural backgrounds. Two factors need to be in place for the proper integration of the Romani people: *willingness* and *opportunity*, in other words, knowledge of the Romani world and active participation of the Roma. *Willingness* of the Roma to share in and collaborate with the cultural integration process and a definition of appropriate and realistic *opportunities* to tackle the needs of the Roma, while respecting their cultural diversity, are the starting point.

In public opinion, the conception of the Roma minority is one-dimensional, far removed from society in both time and place; the Roma people are treated by politics and the media as human refuse, to be relegated to the extreme periphery of the city, where city-dwellers send their rubbish both in their minds and in reality. They are the modern monuments to the segregation desired by



politics, without distinction of colour. The Roma minority has internalised the forced adaptation to its circumstances, but the transformation we are experiencing today points at a sophisticated cultural integration, in which a greater cultural awareness is being consolidated. The active and purposeful confrontation of cultures, for the purpose of critical re-examination, allows us to be the protagonists of a new and necessarily different “Romanipé”.

It means redefining our stance in favour of a better future, restoring a dynamic and competitive relationship of cultural exchange, and demanding the right to diversity. The Roma minority now has an enormous opportunity if it manages, in the healthy conflict between generations and communities, to overcome the frustrations of the past and push forward to the future without discarding all that is good in its tradition.

# Forgotten by time



Tanja Fajon

I grew up in an environment without many minorities, in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. The only “immigrants” were, at that time, people from the other republics of Yugoslavia, mainly Bosnians. We used to call Roma people “gypsies”, but to my knowledge as a teenager they were nomads or were living in little ghettos; they had their own traditional culture and we did not have any close encounters with them, except that we had a great Roma singer Oto Pestner, who conquered our hearts and the world stage. Therefore, I believed that “gypsies” had a great sense for music.

Today I know much more about the life and different culture and traditions of Roma people, but I am still trying to find out the answer to whether we will ever be able to live together. We all know that Roma people are usually living in the margins of our societies, in a very poor environment without almost any possibility to earn a decent living and get a good education. Those who manage to, often prefer to forget about their roots and origins. In my country we do not have major problems with Roma communities, but still there are many tensions between Roma and non-Roma. Recently, we could hear about the growing unhappiness of the non-Roma population about the fact that unemployed Roma have a better income than others, who complained that they have to work hard to make a decent living. I understand the frustration and anger. Nevertheless that cannot be an excuse for anti-Roma violence. Roma are European citizens. We have to integrate them in our societies. And they have to be willing to learn our language, to respect our culture and habits as much as we have to be able to understand their culture and roots.

We have a positive example in Slovenia. Recently I visited the town of Murska Sobota, where Roma people are better integrated into society than elsewhere. It had the first Roma representative ever in the City Council and it has a Commission for Roma questions, which is dealing with their actual problems. In Murska Sobota Roma people can apply for all jobs in their municipality – in the fields of culture, health, social security, sport or housing. The town has already financed the programmes for Roma in all these areas. The city is also paying a onetime social aid to Roma families or individuals under the same conditions as apply to vulnerable citizens of the majority population. Several programmes have been put in place – from social and pedagogical help to families, integration into society, education, reading and learning, to inclusion, to sport and cultural activities.

The Roma community, called Pušča, next to the city, is today, in the eyes of many, the best example for Europe – an example of good cooperation and co-habitation of the non-Roma and Roma communities. The small local village, established almost ten years ago, is important for Slovenia and it is important for the European Union. Pušča shows that the cooperation and integration of Roma into society is possible and shows the way to do it. The co-existence between the two societies is a work in progress. In Pušča, there is a kindergarten and Roma have their own fire brigade and are involved in many associations that promote their interests. When visiting this Roma village, where they have built charming houses and decorated them with many flowers, a few months ago, the community was just celebrating its local festival. They were preparing the field outside the village as a playground for Roma and “white” kids. They also presented a plan to open a music school for kids from both sides; an excellent idea to teach kids how to play together. There is no doubt that Roma people have a great natural feeling for music. It is like sport, bringing people closer to each other, uniting them. As is also the case in a street in the village, called “white street”, where several mixed families from the majority and minority live together.

We need more positive stories like this. Instead, in Europe we are today – unfortunately – hearing much bad news. We cannot, and we should not, ignore that. Take the events of the last year, when we faced a collective punishment of Roma people – the expulsion of many families from France. This is clearly not the right policy. It is not the strategy which can assure progress. It was shocking to learn recently of all the problems Romania is facing with the growing number of Roma people. Unofficially this number has already reached 2 million. Many Roma are literally pushed out to the edge and they are living in a very difficult environment and in great poverty. Our visit to Ferentari in February this year, known as “the land forgotten by time”, in the fifth district of Bucharest, was a sad experience on its own. The big grey buildings from the old Soviet era – many of them without windows, electricity or water – are a disgrace to human dignity. I met a man in his thirties with his young wife, their 10 year old and their newborn, all living in a 10 metre square room – the bed, the toilet and the small cooker all in one space. Asking him what he does to survive, he replied: “occasional work.” Looking around the miserable grey place I wondered how much misery human beings are able to stand. Wondering how the baby could survive, I posed my next question: “What happens if someone is ill?” I was deeply shocked by the answer: “You don’t want to know.” That is how people are forced to live and survive on the edge. It is difficult to imagine that around 40.000 Roma people are living in this part of the town, in the capital of an EU member state.

Realising this misery of human life, I tried to explore the solutions. Sadly, I realised, that for decades we have had many excellent documents and strategies, many good ideas and proposals on how to integrate Roma in our societies. But while recalling this, I came to the conclusion that most of them have failed. Therefore, we need urgent action. We need to bring all these proposals into practice. We have to find out which are the good examples of integration and social inclusion. We have to exchange information about them, we have to learn from each other and we have to help Roma people – European citizens – to get an equal

chance, to offer them education, health and social security. Children need to be taken off the streets. It is not mission impossible but it needs a lot of good will. I was impressed by School 136, one of the rare success stories of Roma integration programmes in Romania. In this school, which is a project of the Centre for Roma and Minorities, around a thousand children – not only Roma – have been educated. It offers them new possibilities by being active in a football team, learning through film-making, or photography. Of course, this needs political and financial support. Therefore, Roma need to be represented at the levels of national and local governments. They only have confidence and trust in their leaders, therefore, it is necessary that Roma representatives have equal chances to run in elections. We need to give them a push. Unfortunately, often when Roma people succeed in life, they prefer to deny their roots and declare themselves solely as belonging to the national majority.

Serious actions from the European governments to integrate Roma people in our societies can not bring results overnight. For them to become really visible we will need many years, sometimes decades. However models like the one in Slovenia with the village Pušča next to Murska Sobota or School 136 in the suburb of Bucharest, should be very good examples for Europe and should also be found elsewhere.

# Roma in Western Europe



# The Process of Inclusion of the Roma Community in Spain: A Model for Europe?



Isidro Rodriguez

If there is one thing that typifies the Spanish Roma community, it is the major process of change and transformation that it has been going through for 25 or 30 years, and above all, their significant achievements in terms of social integration, access to rights and exercising their citizenship. This process of change has enabled them to make more progress in recent decades than in the six centuries of their presence on the Iberian Peninsula.

It has resulted, firstly, in a significant improvement in living conditions for Spanish Roma families. New opportunities have been opened up, obstacles have been removed so that they can be fully integrated into society, and there have been transformations in the community itself. The Roma community is now more diverse and heterogeneous and has not been left on the fringes of the social transformations that have taken place in Spain. There is now a greater presence of Roma women and young people in employment, education and social participation than was the case for their parents or grandparents; they aspire to enjoy more opportunities and openly express their desires, or those of their community, to make progress on social integration.

Often the effects of these processes are not easy to evaluate or measure in the short term, and sometimes it appears that not much progress has been made, but we are already seeing some impact, and it will probably become more visible in the coming years.

Perhaps it is easier to appreciate the magnitude of the transformations if we say that in 1978 more than 75% of Roma housing was sub-standard, while now 88% of Roma families live in



standard homes and only 4% of Roma families are living in poor conditions in shacks.<sup>1</sup> Until very recently, the vast majority of Roma people were street sellers, refuse collectors or temporary workers in the countryside. Now, although there is high unemployment and underemployment, 51% of those who are working are employed in the labour market.<sup>2</sup> While in 1986 the majority of Roma children were outside the education system, they are now all in education and all complete primary education, although there is a high drop-out rate at secondary level.<sup>3</sup>

However, the assessment of this progress is much more negative if we compare the situation of the Roma community with that of the population as a whole. This leads us to view the situation much more pessimistically and to say that the progress made has been clearly insufficient and that there are continuing inequalities in the areas in which social rights come into play. Belonging to the Roma community is still a factor in inequality. In the favourable context of economic growth over the last 10 years it has not been possible to prevent the Roma people from continuing to be over-represented in terms of exclusion,<sup>4</sup> with 12% of Roma citizens in a situation of social exclusion, when they only amount to 2% of the Spanish population.

## **Inclusion policies for the Roma community in Spain**

Our country has one of the largest Roma populations in Europe<sup>5</sup> and leads the countries in which the Roma community has achieved the best living conditions and levels of social integration. This is despite the fact that, as we said, the Spanish

<sup>1</sup> *Mapa sobre vivienda y comunidad gitana en España 2007*. Madrid: Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2008. [www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/mapavivienda/](http://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/mapavivienda/).

<sup>2</sup> *Población gitana y empleo: un estudio comparado*. Madrid: Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2007. [www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/estudioempleo/](http://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/estudioempleo/).

<sup>3</sup> *Incorporación y trayectoria de las niñas gitanas en la ESO* / Centro de Investigación y Documentación Educativa, Instituto de la Mujer. Fundación Secretariado Gitano. Madrid: FSG, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> *VI Informe FOESSA sobre exclusión y desarrollo social en España*. Madrid: Cáritas Española, 2008. [www.foessa.org](http://www.foessa.org).

<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that the Roma population is between 750.000 (FSG, 2007) and 900.000 people (FOESSA, 2008).

Roma community continues to suffer from inequality and its members are very far from enjoying the living standards of the rest of the population.

This situation has resulted in the phrase “Spanish model of Roma inclusion” being coined to refer to the relative success in the process of inclusion conducted since the 1980s, which is now receiving special attention. This is not, however, as one might think, due to us having had an actual policy or specific strategy for including the Roma community. Instead it is firstly because of the way in which our social protection system has succeeded in benefiting and having a positive impact on the situation of the Roma people. Secondly, it is because we have used a pragmatic approach that has prioritised measures to reduce inequalities and improve objective living conditions over other approaches that are more focused on issues of identity, defending the rights of minorities or political participation, which although they are very important issues, only began to be dealt with in the last five years. In short, the predominant approach has been to focus on individuals as people and as citizens, rather than as Roma.

The fundamental pillar of this approach, or of the “Spanish model”, as pointed out by José Manuel Fresno,<sup>6</sup> lies in the fact that our welfare and social protection system, which came into being only recently, has remained universal in its benefits and been clearly inclusive of Roma people. This means that in some areas, such as access to housing, the system has especially benefited many Roma families above other families, not because of their ethnicity but because they are citizens with greater difficulties and a lower income.

The opportunity to acquire public housing in districts with a non-Roma population; access to schools; access to free, high-quality services from the national health service; receiving a non-contributory pension at the age of 65; or the poorest families receiving other aid or social benefits (such as minimum income programmes), etc., in other words guaranteeing them all of these opportunities from the welfare state, has radically changed their social situation.

<sup>6</sup> Municipal Programme for the Eradication of Shanty Areas in Avilés (2006)

This is the policy with the greatest objective impact on social inclusion and from which we have the most to learn: the main instrument for social integration available to every Member State is to ensure that Roma people have equal access to the rights and social benefits that exist for all citizens. This is not, however, enough to correct the inequalities. This is because the Roma people are starting from a long-standing situation of poverty, exclusion and social rejection, and they have a poor image and a strong element of cultural identity, which has often been an obstacle rather than an opportunity for inclusion.

The other pillar of the model has therefore been based, as well as on universal measures, on implementing measures specifically aimed at that community in order to correct and compensate for the inequalities that they started with, which continue to exist. Specific, adapted responses have been developed in areas such as education, housing, access to employment and health improvement. The objective of these measures is mainstreaming, and they have never sought to segregate.

These measures, which have been carried out by the authorities themselves, and in which non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have played a significant role, have not generally had set, shared guidelines, and their implementation has been very patchy across the regions.

It is important to highlight that there has been a much greater sensitivity shown in recent years at all levels of government – state, regional and local – towards the Roma community, which has resulted in a significant increase in financial resources and specific social inclusion measures, and the development of initiatives for institutional recognition and dialogue with Roma organisations.

The following appear to be some of the key instruments through which the specific measures aimed at the Roma population have been developed:

The *National Roma Development Plan*. This was the first financial and political instrument, launched in 1989, and has promoted educational projects for Roma women on basic family care, etc.,

with an annual state budget complemented by the regional and local governments.

*Subsidies for Roma NGOs.* Through an annual competition for NGOs funded by 0.7% of Spanish taxes, there is funding for *Pueblo gitano*.

European inclusion policies have also had a big impact. They have set out guidelines and objectives that both the authorities and some NGOs have been able to benefit from in recent years:

*The National Action Plans on Social Inclusion.* In Spain the Lisbon Strategy had a positive effect on policies towards the Roma people. The Open Method of Coordination meant that we were required to draw up National Action Plans on Social Inclusion, which since 2001 have incorporated a specific chapter for the Roma community.

This model has been reflected in the regional and local plans for combating exclusion, the majority of which include actions with the Roma community.

We hope that the new EU 2020 strategy will do more to link measures aimed at the Roma community with all the country's inclusion policies. Currently our government is taking on board a large proportion of the demands of social organisations, and some specific measures are being considered for the Roma population.

*The Operational Programme "Fighting against Discrimination".* The Structural Funds are another key instrument in European policies. Something that has been of great significance for policies to include the Roma community in the last decade has been the impact that these funds have had, and the innovative way in which they have been used in Spain. The Multi-regional Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination 2000-2006, which is now in the 2007-2013 period, has made a decisive contribution to implementing specific measures, aimed at the most excluded groups. The role of some large NGOs<sup>7</sup> in

<sup>7</sup> Cruz Roja Española, Cáritas Española, Fundación ONCE, Fundación Luis Vives and Fundación Secretariado Gitano participate in the OP-FD as private operators.

managing and implementing these measures, which is a new thing in Europe, has made it possible to design projects that are flexible and adapted to each of the groups.

The *Acceder* Programme, managed by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), is an example of how the funds can be used effectively to achieve very positive results and lasting impacts. This programme of personalised routes to access employment has achieved 40 000 employment contracts in its 11 years of existence and has reached 58 000 people in 50 cities. Its good results,<sup>8</sup> its impact on the conditions for accessing the labour market for Roma people, and its capacity to involve resources and participation from local and regional authorities and businesses mean that it is a benchmark programme in Europe. In this second period, the programme has incorporated two new areas of action: the first is education, and the second is looking after immigrant Roma people (mainly from Romania and Bulgaria).

To conclude, I will discuss the fact that in Europe we are at a crossroads and at a special time for the Roma issue. Perhaps for the first time in the history of this people, the cause of the Roma has come onto the political agenda of the European institutions and of the member states. It has emerged in European Parliament resolutions, the two European summits on the Roma people and the creation of the EU Platform for Roma Inclusion, and it has been announced that in April 2011 a European framework for national Roma integration strategies will be launched. At the same time, we have seen expulsions of Roma that take us back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and are not only an infringement of the fundamental rights of these people, but go against the very essence of the European project that we are committed to. One of humanity's best and most ambitious undertakings cannot prosper if it leaves out the most vulnerable people and those who have for a long time been the least protected and the most persecuted by the member states.

All the signs seem to be that there is the will and the need to refocus European policies on the Roma population and that the

<sup>8</sup> *Acceder. Informe de Resultados 2000 – 2006*. Madrid: FSG, 2007. [www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/memoriaacceder2007](http://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/memoriaacceder2007)

European institutions are adopting a more pragmatic approach focused on specific results. Therefore, without abandoning the areas that have been a priority, such as issues surrounding protecting culture and identity, recognition and political participation or the empowerment of Roma organisations, there is an urgent need to prioritise guaranteeing the fundamental rights of Roma people and their effective access to social rights. There is also an urgent need to seek and demand an impact on equal opportunities, participation in the economy, employment, education and health, access to decent housing and living together in non-segregated areas.

This approach can take shape through the following EU policy instruments:

- *The inclusion policy*: part of the EU 2020 strategy, through its objective of inclusive growth, which should expressly place the Roma community at the heart of the symbolic initiatives of the strategy, especially, but not exclusively, the Platform Against Poverty, and the National Reform Programmes of each Member State. The Commission should not hesitate to play a more active role, establishing guidelines and priorities, and evaluating the progress of the member states in terms of inclusion for the Roma population.
- *The anti-discrimination policy*: ensuring that the Treaties and European anti-discrimination and anti-racism legislation are applied in each of the member states.
- *The Structural Funds*: by making them the EU's main financial and policy instrument for social cohesion, incorporating social inclusion as a priority objective for all the funds, specifically mentioning the Roma population as a target group, inter alia, for the actions financed by the Structural Funds and ensuring that this is truly reflected in the design and implementation of the Operational Programmes; and by improving efficiency and evaluating the impact on the inclusion of the Roma population.

The Roma people are European citizens who need to be protected, have their rights guaranteed and be offered the sure expectation of being able to enjoy the same opportunities as other European citizens. Measures need to be aimed at them to compensate for the major social inequalities that they suffer, but, like other European citizens, they also need to be required to contribute and commit themselves to social integration.

# Integrated Approach of Roma in the Netherlands

Cor de Vos

For many years Dutch municipalities have been struggling with complex problems within and around their Roma communities. At the same time they are facing increased pressure from their inhabitants to act more effectively in solving these problems. Dutch municipalities have tried to do this in many different ways, but none of the approaches have led to sustainable successes so far.

## Background

The Roma population in the Netherlands is varied in composition. Roma communities in the Netherlands have different cultural and religious backgrounds, depending on their country of origin. It is difficult to give exact figures about the number of Roma in the Netherlands, because there is no registration based on ethnicity. The estimation is that there are 20.000 to 40.000 Roma in the country at the moment.

In 1977 the Dutch government granted a General Pardon to the Roma who stayed in the Netherlands at that moment. They mainly came from Eastern Europe. In total 570 Roma received a residence permit. This group was hosted by 16 Dutch municipalities at that time, including Nieuwegein.

The local authorities presumed that the Roma families would integrate within a three or four year period. By providing permanent accommodation and by offering good schooling and integration programmes, it was expected that the families would adjust easily to Dutch society.



But these expectations did not become reality. After more than 30 years we have to conclude that, compared to other groups in society, the Roma population of Nieuwegein has made the least use of opportunities for employment, schooling and participation in general. The Roma community in Nieuwegein consists of approximately 400 people now, living in houses throughout different areas of the municipality. It is an isolated group of families: there are few contacts with other inhabitants and we witness a decreasing cohesion within the Roma community itself as well.

## **National perspective**

Nieuwegein is not the only Dutch municipality facing these problems. Commissioned by the Dutch ministry of Integration, in 2008 research was done in the 16 so called Roma municipalities. The research identified the following main problem areas:

- Absenteeism from school, especially among Roma girls.
- High unemployment
- Dependency on social benefits
- Bad housing conditions
- Discrimination
- Anti-social behaviour in living areas and shopping centres
- High crime figures
- Poor health of the elderly

At the end of 2008 the Dutch Roma municipalities realised that many of the problems were becoming too much for the local authorities to deal with alone. Therefore, it was decided to work together as a Platform, based at the Association of Dutch Municipalities (the VNG in The Hague). The VNG strongly promotes the empowerment and quality of local government. 431 Municipalities are member of the VNG. It is the principal representative of the Dutch municipalities and promotes and discusses the association's interests with the national govern-

ment, the Dutch Parliament, the European institutions, and other public organizations.

In June 2009 the VNG formalised the Platform Roma-municipalities. At the moment 12 Dutch municipalities are member of the Platform: Nieuwegein, Enschede, Oldenzaal, Veldhoven, Utrecht, Capelle aan den IJssel, Lelystad, Ede, Sittard-Geleen, Stein, 's-Hertogenbosch and Amsterdam South East. I have been appointed chairman of the Platform.

Through the Platform the municipalities share experiences, good practice and communicate with the national government. We also invite experts, such as members of Dutch Roma organisations, to exchange views and to talk about possible solutions. Fundraising and international developments are also an important issue on the agenda of the Platform.

An important factor for inter-municipal cooperation is the lobby towards the national government for recognition of the problems local governments are facing and for the support of the national government in finding solutions to the problems mentioned above. After an intensive lobby of the Dutch municipalities, in June 2009 the Dutch Minister of Integration shared his views with the National Parliament on the introduction of a “Roma approach in the Netherlands”.<sup>1</sup> The Minister referred in his official letter to the urgent problems with the local Roma population, as reported by the municipalities, such as “disproportional high criminality, high school absenteeism and drop out”.

The letter states that the central government recognises the urgency of the problem but maintains its position of keeping municipalities responsible for developing and implementing policies regarding this group. Nevertheless, the Minister of Integration also decided to support financially the new VNG Platform, especially to monitor the lessons learned and the good practices at local level.

<sup>1</sup> Dutch title: “Aanpak voor Roma in Nederland” (26<sup>th</sup> of June 2009, 31 700 XVIII, nr. 90)

The ministerial letter was discussed in Parliament and attracted a lot of attention: it has been subject of public debate and resulted in formal statements from the parties concerned, including the Roma, and was widely reported in national and regional media.

The Platform welcomed the recognition by the national government that the problems with the local Roma populations are urgent, but considered the commitment expressed by the national government (such as financial input) as insufficient.

On 8 October 2009, during the so called General Consultation on Roma Children in the Dutch Parliament, the Ministers of Integration and Education announced that they were willing to give the Roma municipalities €600.000 in 2010 so that they could increase the quality of the municipal capacity to improve the schooling of Roma children. This financial contribution of the national government was a good start to a long term process. We succeeded in getting the topic of Roma on the political agenda of the Dutch government, after years of silence at the national level.

During the second half of 2010, the political and media attention on the Roma increased further because of the approach taken by the French government. But this type of media interest did not help the Dutch Roma municipalities in getting serious attention for the problems at local level. Discussions in the media and national parliament focused again on themes such as discrimination and stigmatization, which made it difficult for us to continue telling the real story and explaining how we experience the problems within our communities.

As a Platform, we would like to continue discussing the problems in an honest and realistic way, including with representatives of the Roma communities. It is very important that the Roma representatives take up responsibility to improve the participation of their own group, and to find solutions to the problems that some Roma are causing.

At the moment the Platform is discussing with the Dutch Minister for Security and Justice how to cope with the high crime figures. The solution to that problem cannot be found at local level, but

has to be looked for at national or even European level. Within the Dutch police organization a national knowledge centre on Roma will be established. Also contacts will be set up with the Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings because part of the criminal activities involving Roma may be linked to human trafficking.

## Local Perspective

Due to the urgency of the problems with Roma families in Nieuwegein and the appeal on local government by inhabitants to do something about the rising crime rates and the anti-social behaviour in their living areas or shopping centres, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen of Nieuwegein decided to start a new integrated programme to manage the problematic situation.

The main objectives of the integrated programme are the improvement of schooling for Roma children, the reduction of poverty and reliance on social benefits, the diminution of neighbourhood anti-social behaviour, and criminality. The integrated programme is based on a methodology called *Wisselgeld* (Exchange).

The main goal of the *Wisselgeld* approach is to attain a positive change in the family system, with a focus on the child, the parents and the living environment. *Wisselgeld* concentrates on assisting Roma families with complex problems (multi-problem families), which can only be tackled by an individual approach. This method is implemented by so called mediators who make an action plan per family and are responsible for coordination with other parties involved.

The *Wisselgeld* approach is based on the principle of exchange: I give you something (assistance), but in return I expect you to give me something back (for example: I assist you with solving your debt problems, but in return your children are going to school).

In Nieuwegein we learned from experience that the complex questions concerning our Roma citizens can only be managed if we combine both “investing in care” and the “enforcement of

rules” in our approach. We have to offer opportunities to Roma, but at the same time respond appropriately if they do not use them.

Within the integrated approach, the municipality works together with a number of organizations such as the police, youth care, the office of the public prosecutor, the council of children’s protection, housing corporations, and social work.

The *Wisselgeld* programme started on 1 January 2009 and by now mediators are active in 26 Roma families. Good progress has been made in getting children back to school and there has also been some success in decreasing the reliance on welfare benefits. Furthermore, the *Wisselgeld* approach has ensured greater involvement and more efficient ways of working on the part of the professionals from participating external organisations and also public servants within different municipal departments.

The strength of the new approach is the combination of support for the Roma families to participate in Dutch society and the consistent enforcement of Dutch laws and rules towards them (in the same way as other citizens are treated!). The local government of Nieuwegein does not view Roma as victims who are depending on the help of others in society, but sees them as ordinary citizens who need to take responsibility for their lives and the lives of their children. Moreover, we do not want to conceal the problems: Roma citizens are not only facing complex problems and serious obstacles to participation, but a considerable number of them cause serious problems for other citizens in the Nieuwegein community.

Another strong element of our programme is that it is not only an approach of the municipality by itself, but of a network of relevant organizations. In the past all these organisations developed their own way of working with, or sometimes avoiding, Roma families, but there was no coordination at all and, therefore, hardly any positive results were reached. Because of the new, integrated approach this is now changing in a positive way.

## Recommendations

- To be able to gain results in fighting the complex problems of the Roma, it is necessary to develop an integrated approach of “setting limits as well as offering perspectives”. The complex questions about Roma citizens can only be managed by combining both “investing in care” and the “maintenance of rules”.
- A general local policy towards Roma will not be effective in improving the participation of Roma citizens. The cohesion within the Roma community is decreasing and the problems of different families are so specific and complicated that they can only be tackled by an individual approach.
- The local municipality cannot do it alone. It is necessary to build a local and regional network of multi level organisations co-operating together in a consistent and consequent way.
- The national government has to take up responsibility and work closely together with the local authorities. The relevant ministries, the national institutions and organisations involved such as the police, youth care, the office of the public prosecutor, the council for children’s protection, housing corporations, social welfare, and social work need to gain more knowledge and expertise on the specific problems.
- Roma representatives have to take up their responsibility as well to improve the participation of their own group, but also to find solutions to the problems that some of them are causing.

We all need to realise that this approach will not deliver quick results: the problems of Roma are complex and have a long history. It will take many years to solve these and, therefore, it is necessary that both local and national governments commit themselves to continue with their integral programmes for a long time.



# **Participation and Citizenship**





# Civic Participation of Roma – Active Citizenship in Serbia

**Boris Tadić**

The story of the Roma on the continent of Europe and in my country is the story of a fight against their social exclusion. It is the struggle to include fully members of ethnic and minority groups in social and economic affairs of the country that they work and live in.

In Serbia, social exclusion of Roma is most often a combination of different forms of unfulfilled individual civil, political or social rights. According to the latest census in the Republic of Serbia about 110.000 citizens declare themselves members of the Roma national minority, but many surveys point to a much larger number of Roma in the Republic of Serbia. In 2011 the first official census will be taken and the interviewers in Roma settlements will be of Roma origin.

During the last few years, the Republic of Serbia expressed resolve and made important steps towards the systematic support of social inclusion of Roma in order for them to become active members of society.

Serbia's chairmanship of the Roma Decade from 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009 was very important for the promotion of the position of Roma. Bearing in mind the 10 common EU principles for the inclusion of the Roma, the Government of the Republic of Serbia implemented, during its chairmanship, a constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policy which has produced its first results.

Roma minority members participate in the political life of Serbia through Roma political parties – or through other party membership as well – in the highest legislative body of Serbia; last year the National Council of Roma national minority was

elected for the first time. It represents the Roma community in the field of language use, education, culture, and information in the language of their national community; programmes in Roma language are broadcast on both the national and local radio and television stations while Serbia finances two newspapers in Roma language. Despite all these efforts of the entire community, the Roma still do not exercise their rights to the greatest extent available under the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Serbia.

The story of social inclusion is the story of compilation: compilation of the potential inside society and the individual, but also a compilation of differences, of less significant forces that together make up society and make it richer and more substantial.

Social inclusion is an asset for the entire society. It means that individuals should activate and recognise themselves in the process, be responsible for their life – an active approach in overcoming the problem, in making a perception of oneself, and taking over responsibility, are all necessary. On the other hand, society is under the obligation to help and it must look after those who do not exercise fully their basic human rights.

Serbia supports the EU Platform activities for the inclusion of Roma and is ready to participate actively. These activities will improve the coordination of measures and promote the use of means both in EU member states, candidate countries, and potential candidate countries. We have a common goal: a society of equal opportunities in which all its members develop in line with their needs and abilities, fully contributing to the quality of life in Serbia. I am convinced that with these efforts we will learn a lot from each other.

## **Recommendations:**

- To establish a better process of coordination, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of measures that are aimed at improving the position of Roma in society. To encourage inter-departmental cooperation and define the role of actors both at central (different ministries) and local levels.

- To consolidate capacities of Roma non-governmental organizations and encourage activism within Roma communities across Serbia.
- To focus the measures of the policy of social inclusion on Roma, having in mind the multi-sectoral issues (gender equality, poverty reduction, and the fight against discrimination).
- To work on the improvement of education of Roma. More investment in inclusive and good-quality education of Roma children, including education in their early childhood as well as life-long education opportunity for Roma adults.
- To introduce new measures for the encouragement of employment of Roma, because it is the best way out of poverty and exclusion.
- To secure a better programming of EU funds for the issues of social inclusion and poverty reduction of Roma (both IPA national funds and IPA Multi-Beneficiary regional funds).



# Roma as Active Citizens: Closing the Gap between Political Elites and Local Communities



Catherine Messina Pajic

Victimized by violence, segregated in settlements, deprived of education, healthcare, and jobs, and routinely denied their rights as citizens, Roma are also excluded from the political arena where they could attempt to address these problems. As a result, many Roma no longer seek to participate in politics or civic life at any level, persuaded that it is a losing proposition. This reticence is seen by some in the majority population as a simple, and false, solution to “the Roma problem”: if they are ignored, eventually they will go away.

However, the impact of the Roma’s disaffection is immense. Countries with large Roma populations, primarily in Central and Eastern Europe, court social instability and enormous economic costs as these impoverished communities grow larger and more distant from the state apparatus. Last year’s expulsion by France of Bulgarian and Romanian Roma migrants suggests that even established European democracies – and the European Union as a whole – are ill-prepared to grapple with this growing population that is living not as part of the state but parallel to it. These events have shown that until Roma, as a community, become active, participatory citizens who can use the political process to resolve issues, secure resources and obtain services, democracy in Europe will remain an unfulfilled promise.

Despite myriad assistance strategies to improve their legal and material conditions, little effort has been made to position Roma to help their own cause through political participation. Roma must

organise their communities to gain effective political representation and hold governments accountable. It is in everyone's interest for Roma to amass this power to solve their problems peacefully before violence and extremism take hold.

### **Active Citizenship: What is it?**

Citizenship implies a relationship between people and their government that includes a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect the public welfare. Citizens are essential to democratic governance. They give life and meaning to democratic principles and to the institutions designed to create accountability and set limits on government power. Without the active involvement of citizens, government power can be abused to benefit only a narrow segment of society.

Citizen activism is a democratic right and responsibility that can constructively influence state behaviour and socioeconomic development. To exercise this right, Roma must first understand and embrace the concept of citizenship. They also need knowledge to make decisions about policy choices, along with the skills to voice their concerns, act collectively and hold public officials accountable.

Civil society is a vehicle, like political parties, through which Roma can aggregate their interests, voice their preferences and exercise the power necessary to affect change. Civil society can amplify citizen voices and bridge the divide between Roma and the state. Civil society organizations come in various shapes and sizes, from large, urban-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to small, community-based social groups. Among these are organizations that interact extensively with citizens and, more often the case with Roma, those with very limited interaction, even though they may claim to be working on their behalf. Political decisions on complex socioeconomic challenges, such as Roma inclusion, require broad-based citizen participation, so it is essential that engaged civil society organizations truly involve Romani citizens in their activism.

As many of Europe's newest democracies transformed into democratic societies, assistance strategies typically placed a strong emphasis on developing civil society with much less attention paid to the direct political engagement of individual citizens. In the case of Roma, this has impeded civil society's potential to ensure that government responds to tangible citizen needs. Efforts to strengthen civil society's political power must include involving a broader section of Roma citizens more directly.

## **Barriers to Active Participation by Roma in Civic and Political Life**

In 2009, the National Democratic Institute (NDI or The Institute) conducted an assessment to evaluate the persistent barriers that prevent Roma from actively participating in political and civic life. Romania was selected as a sample based on the size and diversity of its Roma population and the significant funding and effort that has been expended there. Setting aside barriers associated with extreme poverty – illiteracy, poor infrastructure, lack of resources – NDI examined legal, structural and social barriers, using a combination of desk research, public opinion research and personal interviews. Some of the findings are highlighted below; the full report can be found on NDI's website, [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org).<sup>1</sup>

Following centuries of isolation and persecution, and in light of the culture's hierarchical clan-based traditions, it is unsurprising that NDI found virtually no informal or spontaneous local organizing among Roma to address community needs. Such efforts, where they exist, have no support or resources on which to draw.

National and international NGOs that attempt to represent Roma and their issues are often disconnected from local Romani communities. Most of these NGOs are not membership driven, nor do they enjoy widespread support among Roma themselves. As a result, Roma NGOs (and their non-Roma counterparts) typically lack clearly identifiable supporters, a deficit that deprives

<sup>1</sup> [www.ndi.org/Assessment\\_of\\_Barriers\\_to\\_Roma\\_Political\\_Participation\\_in\\_Romania\\_09\\_09](http://www.ndi.org/Assessment_of_Barriers_to_Roma_Political_Participation_in_Romania_09_09)





*Speaking out. France, 2011*

them of political credibility and the ability to influence policy decisions.

Many NGOs, Roma and otherwise, also lack a clear legislative agenda, making more “noise” than discernible progress. In the face of vote-buying schemes, for example, the response is more likely to be a public awareness raising campaign with little chance of success, rather than a serious attempt to change electoral fraud legislation or lobby for greater enforcement of existing laws.

While some NGOs have demonstrated success and have clearly discernible supporters, NGOs generally lack a strong funding base, making them vulnerable to collapse or compromise. Without a diverse base of support through private contributions and membership fees, NGOs rely on government and international funding, which can drive their agendas. This pushes civil society to respond to a narrow field of donor interests, sometimes very specific and politically driven, rather than the broader interests of their beneficiaries or constituents. Thus, many “Roma NGOs,” particularly in Eastern Europe where traditions of philanthropy and volunteerism are still weak, find themselves being held accountable to their donors rather than to Roma communities.

As with civil society, Romani citizens are almost entirely disconnected from political parties. Widespread mistrust of political parties, which cuts across all ethnic lines, is amplified among Roma, particularly in segregated communities. One cause is the lack of meaningful outreach to Roma by political parties of all ethnic stripes, who generally visit only during campaigns, with no follow up after elections.

The lack of strong platforms, policy proposals or even statements on Roma issues reinforces the notion that political parties, regardless of ideology or ethnicity, are not strong Roma advocates. Although Roma could potentially force their issues onto a party platform, the incentive for them to become active members or even supporters of any political party is extremely low.

Allegations of vote-buying, electoral fraud, intimidation, and other irregularities, are widespread in Roma communities. These offenses are perpetrated by both mainstream and ethnically-based Roma parties. Roma communities, and particularly their leaders, are complicit in these transactions. Financial destitution is a motivator, but political exclusion contributes to the choice by many Roma of short-term economic gain over long-term representation, since they have little faith in the system.

These factors add up to a system in which Roma communities at the grassroots are disconnected from political elites – both their own and those in the majority population. Romani citizens lack the wherewithal and incentive to seek political solutions to their problems. Even when they can access critical resources and power structures, they are not often heard by their own leaders, much less by those in the majority population.

This gap between political elites and local citizens is perhaps the greatest barrier to Roma empowerment and inclusion.

## **Recommendations for Grassroots Empowerment of Roma Citizens**

For both civil society and political parties, the keys to overcoming the barriers noted above are *representation and accountability*.

Roma communities need to elect officials who will genuinely represent their interests, and whom they can hold accountable. While Roma need to be present in the halls of parliament, more important is that their concerns be addressed by those who represent them.

Similarly, the presence of Roma NGOs and advocates is not nearly as critical as the presence of Roma issues on the political agenda – which will happen only if NGOs that act on behalf of Roma can legitimately claim they represent a clearly defined constituency. Very few Roma NGOs carry a significant membership base with genuine electoral influence. In contrast, the *bulibasha* (traditional Roma clan leader) can deliver an entire neighbourhood's vote on election day, making him the local power broker, often to the detriment of the community.

Roma voters will continue to be pushed aside if they allow their votes to be brokered and bought rather than earned by those who are committed to better education policy, healthcare facilities or jobs. Although illegal, vote-buying among impoverished Roma flourishes, distorting their political voice. Roma need to use their numbers and their votes to demand results from those they elect, otherwise they lose their power over those who claim to represent them.

In short, they should demand that democracy delivers for them.

If Roma citizens are to be truly empowered at the grassroots level, governments, mainstream political parties, and the international community must provide fertile ground in which activism can grow. Political parties and civil society organizations need to do a better job of connecting Roma with their elected representatives so they can make their priorities known, have a say in divvying up resources, and hold candidates and governments accountable at the ballot box and in the press. Specifically, they should provide three things:

- *Skills building programs* for Roma activists and local elected representatives so they can communicate with and engage citizens, advocate for priority issues, and develop realistic legislative and policy options. This will require more projects to enhance the skills of grassroots activists as well as broad-

based civic education. NGOs must train and cultivate young Roma leaders and conduct local civic education projects for Roma.

- *Financial and other resources* to help activists educate and mobilize Roma through public awareness and information programs, advocacy campaigns and community development projects.
- *Access to elected office*, most notably through mainstream political parties that must not only open the door to Roma but actively invite them in. Parties must have better outreach strategies and designated liaisons to Roma communities and NGOs. They must publicly and meaningfully address the situation of Roma through platforms, policy proposals and legislation. These things will only happen when parties make Roma inclusion a priority for all of society at all levels. European party groups, and in particular the S&D group as the party of social justice and equality, should encourage their members to recruit Roma, promote their development as future leaders and place their issues on party platforms.

Once the ground is fertile, the seeds of activism need to take root and grow within the Roma communities. For this to happen, Roma political and civic leaders need to provide three things to their communities:

- *Platforms*, not platitudes. Roma need real policies and legislative agendas that address genuine everyday needs. Ethnic parties that claim to represent Roma must win back their voters by drafting substantive platforms and strategies.
- *Representation* by elected officials who place community needs over self interest. They must reinvigorate their parties with a new generation of supporters, candidates and leaders who will demonstrate their commitment to public service.
- *Cooperation* by civil society around common concerns and through coalitions among Roma and with non-Roma who can amplify their political voices. Civil society organizations of all ethnic stripes should develop community organizing projects that bridge ethnic lines and seek constructive engagement

with parliaments to promote broadly supported, clearly defined legislative agendas – and then hold them accountable for their passage.

A donor to the Roma cause once asked what it would take to get 10.000 Roma out in the street to demand equal rights and better government. The answer is the same thing it would take to get 10.000 votes for a Roma parliamentary candidate or 10.000 Roma registered to vote.

It takes grassroots organizing by skilled activists who listen to people in the community, offer clear and credible solutions to everyday problems, and inspire and train volunteers to work on their behalf. It takes integrity, honesty and dedication to public service. It takes willingness to work with others from outside one's own ethnic group.

It takes leadership, on the part of both Roma and majority populations. It takes political leaders who are willing to make the unpopular issue of Roma inclusion a genuine priority at home, not merely political rhetoric in Brussels. But in equal measure it takes Roma leaders who can inspire and mobilize their communities to participate in civic and political life so they can demand more from government and elected officials.

## **NDI's Response**

With support from the National Endowment for Democracy and the Open Society Institute, and in cooperation with European bodies, NDI launched an initiative in 2003 to increase Roma political participation in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia, which has since expanded to Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia. NDI has provided training, public opinion and comparative research, and real-time assistance to approximately 1.500 Roma in governance, electoral participation, political representation and policy advocacy.

NDI has trained hundreds of Roma to contest elections as candidates and organisers, representing Roma parties and incorporated into mainstream parties. In 2010 Slovak local

elections, more than 330 Roma were elected to local office (including almost 30 mayors), a 50 percent increase from the previous elections. Notably, some Roma candidates attracted non-Roma votes. The Institute also supports voter education campaigns in Roma communities, nonpartisan monitoring in polling stations on election day, and post-election surveys of Roma voters. A priority has been Roma women, most of whom face disproportionately high barriers to participation.

Increased political engagement is enabling Roma to advocate on their own behalf. NDI is supporting Roma groups as they work to gain a thorough understanding of the issues afflicting their communities, communicate those issues to the public through media strategies, and master national and local legislative and fiscal processes so they can push for government action. For example, in its annual report card on government performance on Roma issues, Slovakia's Roma Public Policy Institute called for concrete measures—such as demographic and economic data collection—to better inform policies.

NDI has done this work throughout the region, helping young Roma leaders to bridge the gap between political institutions and local communities. NDI is opening politics and government to Roma and developing skilled active Roma citizens who can take advantage of these opportunities. Given the severe deprivations experienced among Roma, this is a long-term initiative for incremental but promising change.



# Roma Integration: Civic Participation is not a “Luxury Option”



Lili Makaveeva

In September 2010, the current deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, publicly shared his view that “... Roma communities are incubators for crime...” Tsvetanov, who also chairs the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (NCCEDI) – the government’s main advisory body for Roma issues – was the next day rebuked by a European Commission spokesperson. But his remarks were hardly incidental and echoed earlier remarks by his predecessor as NCCEDI-chair, who in 2003 publicly stated “it is impossible to speak about Roma integration, as they are sluggards, lazy idlers.” Such views illustrate the discursive environment in which Roma issues are discussed in Bulgaria. Just open the newspapers and you will find tens of examples every single day.

This discourse has profoundly affected policy making. Policies and programmes tend to treat Roma by themselves as the problem, rather than addressing the problems Roma face. It reflects and sustains the relative indifference of administrations, who mostly do not regard Roma issues as their problem, or as something they can contribute to solve. This has led to worrying levels of inaction, whereas programmes that do get implemented very often have a paternalistic taste to them, even when the accompanying political rhetoric is entirely correct.

Roma face a double uphill battle: true involvement in policy making requires the willingness from the side of authorities to engage with Roma as equal stakeholders – which is mostly lacking; and Roma communities have to find the courage and capacity to participate in social life and articulate their claims in a constructive manner. Both are negatively conditioned by a



climate of mutual misunderstanding, which we cannot expect to disappear overnight. But positive examples do exist, in particular at local level, where open dialogue between Roma communities and authorities can make a huge difference.

At a time when it has become a truism to emphasise the importance of Roma participation in policy design and implementation, the nature of this challenge and the different roles civil society plays, are often misunderstood. This article aims to clarify what civic participation actually entails, why it is so important and how grassroots empowerment can contribute to this aim.

### **The benefits of taking civic participation seriously**

Roma issues are often taken as either a matter of “inadequate delivery of social services” – where Roma are policy clients – or a matter of dysfunctional social attitudes – where Roma become policy objects. In both cases, participation in policy making may be seen as something of a luxury, an option. However, such approaches fail to appreciate the underlying problem that Roma are not recognized as full citizens with legitimate claims to equal treatment. Discrimination reveals itself in explicit stigmatization, hate-speech or open racism, but is also present in everyday negative attitudes and the ensuing sense of not being taken seriously as a citizen.

A long-term strategy for Roma integration should aim to achieving equal citizenship for Roma that tackles exactly these underlying patterns. From this perspective citizen participation brings much wider benefits. In the first place, active citizenship is considered inherently good for society. When Roma community activists can openly discuss their interests, they can help resolve conflicts among special interests and discover common, public interests, of which Roma issues can be part on an equal footing. They can build relationships across ethnic boundaries and learn about common problems. Citizen participation offers society the possibility of articulating and solving problems knowledgeably and legitimately so that collective action, including programmes for Roma integration, do not just target Roma but are seen to serve society as a whole.

Secondly, active civic participation stimulates community development. It encourages members of a community to develop the capacity to articulate and promote their interests and resolve conflicts. They may gain the knowledge, resources, and relationships that enable them to influence institutions and decisions to change conditions and solve problems. In this regard, the development of grassroots/community based Roma organisations is especially important, since they can mobilise grassroots Roma and involve them in public life.

Thirdly, participation contributes to individual development. Especially for those most alienated and powerless Roma, it could be seen as part of a “learning trajectory”: involvement in a civic or political activity contributes to self-esteem and provides a sense of dignity, potency, growth and responsibility. Inherently, participation in public life makes someone a citizen. Collaboration helps individuals become part of networks that provide social support.

Finally, civic participation contributes to successful policy implementation. When Roma citizens are better able to provide information about their needs or take part in programme planning, administrations and implementers could develop more relevant, acceptable and legitimate services and activities.

## **Institutionalising the otherness of Roma**

Reality is quite different, however. Many in Bulgaria take for granted that Roma integration has failed. The reasons for this failure are rarely investigated, but there is a widespread opinion that Roma do not want to integrate. As a consequence, they are routinely blamed not only for the failure of their own ethnic group but also perceived as a burden to society or a potential security risk.

This image of Roma people is defined by outsiders on the base of negative stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma. This is also being confirmed continuously by biased public speeches of some politicians, public figures or journalists. Not only do Roma lack the resources, capacity and position to effectively challenge

such views, many Roma have internalised their position as outsiders and evade taking active part in public life. Tacitly, they consider their status as “unwanted guests” of their country as normal, turn inwards and remain passive in the face of unequal treatment and negative attitudes.

The – implicit or explicit – labelling of Roma as a group that needs “treatment” is reflected in and has compounded their mode of participation in public life. The situation can be described using the “ladder of civic participation”-model proposed in 1969 by Sherry Arnstein<sup>1</sup> and which defines ideal types of civic involvement, from non-participation, through to “tokenism” to, ultimately, citizen power. The “normality” of dealing with Roma issues in a prejudiced manner, presupposes and reproduces civic participation of Roma at the lowest level of this ladder: manipulation, therapy or tokenism.

Roma are often placed in powerless advisory committees with the ostensible purpose of “educating” them or gaining their support for others’ positions. Or they are given information but are not invited to contribute their feedback or proposals. If they are asked to give their point of view, public authorities rarely commit to action. Roma may be listened to, but are rarely heard. In many cases a few “Roma-representatives” are placed on committees or boards with nice sounding titles but without mandate and limited influence over policies or resource allocation. Such patterns of Roma participation are apparent not only in Bulgaria, but will be readily recognised by activists in all countries with significant Roma minorities: forums that grant Roma formal involvement, but do not provide for any meaningful influence on policy processes.

The tragedy is that such forms of civic involvement are not only ineffective in contributing to better policy outcomes, but may even negatively affect the efficiency of measures. Since it is impossible to cover up that token participation does not benefit Roma communities, the interventions they produce are perceived

<sup>1</sup> Sherry Arnstein (1969) “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35 (4), pp. 216-224.

with distrust and seen by most Roma to benefit others in the first place: the state, political parties or the agencies or non-governmental organisations that implement them. As a result, they are not recognised as legitimate, discourage Roma to engage, may fuel resentment and create new conflicts or will be prone to everyday forms of resistance.

If we want to accomplish progress, we need to break from the existing pattern of limited, tokenistic, civic involvement. Policies that confirm or entrench treatment of Roma as silenced objects that need special treatment will fail to contribute to genuine social integration. Equal stakeholdership should not be seen as an option to make interventions more easily digestible. It is a precondition for successful integration policies.

## **Challenges for Roma civic participation**

At the present time government policies do not address the conditions that hinder equal citizenship of Roma, nor encourage or provide incentives to administrations to engage in an equal dialogue. Responsibility to change this situation should be equally shared by Roma and non-Roma. Authorities should develop comprehensive policies that integrate a cross-cutting dimension of (grassroots) citizen participation in addressing the problems faced by Roma. Roma communities for their part can contribute by creating a bottom-up movement that incites (local) administrations to engage.

Although feasible, this is obviously challenging. Civic participation depends on motive, opportunity, and means and citizens vary considerably in their ability to take advantage of opportunities for participation. Middle-class citizens, especially those who have a flexible schedule, do not work full-time, are most likely to have time to participate in public life. The conditions of middle-class life offer the means and motivation to see and take advantage of opportunities for participation. Extended formal education, professional work, and intricate social networks prepare middle-class citizens to participate in ways that elude many who are poorer.

Roma belong mainly to the low-income classes and often devote all their time to provide for their families. In addition, the generally low levels of education, lack of professional expertise, poor social experience make bottom-up organisation of Roma communities particularly difficult. In situations where Roma claims to equal influence on policies are anything but readily recognised, it is crucial for Roma to create real opportunities for power. In this connection, Roma grassroots empowerment is essential to take part in civic life and to weigh in on decision making, despite the lack of middle-class conditions and despite the existing stigma and prevailing prejudices.

Training and experience help develop the skills and confidence to organise and take an active part in public affairs. But the central topic for empowerment is to create awareness – among Roma and non-Roma alike – of the rights and responsibilities citizenship entails. This process requires long-term support, in particular to stimulate and facilitate the establishment of formal or informal civic structures that help Roma feel confident about defining their own needs, interests, actions and resources. Structures, which allow them to express their concerns, share and learn, and exercise their abilities to negotiate and represent common interests of their community.

Once such Roma civil structures appear at local level, they enable communities to start formal communication with local administrations. This is significant, because, although most Roma policies are created at higher levels, implementation mostly depends on the dedication of local administrations. Grassroots empowerment creates bottom-up pressure and is instrumental in producing the necessary engagement at local level to tackle problems. There are examples in which such dialogue develops into partnerships and exactly these circumstances are conducive for grassroots groups to articulate their concerns in relation to the interests of overall territorial community, which is the starting point of changing the negative images majority citizens have of Roma.

It is crucial to distinguish the role of civil society organisations that encourage and support civic participation and grassroots empowerment from the activities of NGOs that act mainly as implementers or service providers. Although many of these do invaluable work, some have been established from the misconception that they can be run as private family companies, whose primary goal is to cater for special needs. Such organisations are incapable at addressing and representing community interests, they generate mistrust among Roma and resentment among non-Roma, and they entrench rather than challenge passive attitudes.

### **The significance of political empowerment**

Finally, it is important to reflect on the relation between political participation and grassroots empowerment. Unfortunately, the underrepresentation of Roma in the Bulgarian political system is obvious. Although generally speaking Roma in Bulgaria vote relatively actively during the elections, they are not able to elect significant numbers of Roma representatives, neither at national nor at local level. This situation is due partly to the prevailing culture in political parties, which generally articulate similar views to Roma issues as prevalent in the majority population. If Roma are included in their election lists, this is often merely to canvas votes. Moreover, elected decision makers often find it politically inexpedient to engage with Roma issues, for fear of negative electoral effects, reflecting the uneasy relationship between Roma communities and elected authorities.

In addition, viewed from their perspective, engaging in politics may present grassroots activists with a dilemma. Because politics necessarily involves taking sides at some point, elected Roma run the risk of finding themselves on the wrong side of the political dividing line. Since political parties across the spectrum do not fundamentally differ in their approaches towards Roma (especially at local level personal commitment and dedication often plays a far more important role) the political route to empowerment is not only difficult but also risky. Grassroots

involvement may rather have a civic than a political character and to build Roma alliances may be better at civic level.

On the other hand, formal political participation – in particular at local level – provides Roma activists a level of access to decision-making that is difficult to attain otherwise. Examples show that local Roma councillors can actually influence policies, priority setting and resource allocation. Depending on local circumstances, political empowerment will thus likely be an ever more important part of the grassroots empowerment repertoire. Channelling this development in constructive directions is as much their challenge as it is for mainstream political parties.

## **Conclusion**

Twenty years after the democratic transition in Bulgaria, Roma civil organisations continue to be affected by misunderstandings about their distinct roles and a lack of long-term strategies to facilitate representation and articulation of Roma interests. Furthermore, various grassroots Roma NGOs face a steady loss of human resources: many Roma activists have accepted the idea that integration has failed, because of a lack of visible results and progress and have withdrawn from participating. After Bulgaria's accession to the EU civil organisations have also seen an ever increasing outflow of Roma activists, mainly those belonging to the middle class, who are most likely to take part in civic organizations. Finally, there is a downward trend of available funding, while the advent of “project-based”-management has eroded much needed operational support for basic capacity building, which requires a long-term effort but is essential for grassroots empowerment. All these have drained an already weak Roma civic sector.

The experience of my organisation in supporting and promoting grassroots participation and empowerment, shows that there are important opportunities, however, which evidence suggests is indeed – as the European Commission asserts – a crucial success factor for Roma inclusion policies. Our concrete

recommendations to Bulgarian and European policy makers are, therefore:

- Cherish the Roma civil society you have, in particular those that have an independent position.
- Invest in active citizenship and grassroots organization in a structural way.
- Provide incentives for local administrations to encourage Roma citizen participation towards:
  - Meaningful dialogue and consultation.
  - Local partnership.





# The Historical Importance of Roma Politics



Martin Kovats

## Roma as a Political Identity

In recent years, Roma identity has come to be applied to a wide range of minority communities stretching across Europe. The word derives from the Romani word for man/person and is the traditional appellation for some, mainly Romani speaking groups. Nevertheless, some people and populations use a qualified form of Roma identity (e.g. Xoraxane Roma), or an alternative communal designation (e.g. Kalderash, Sinti, Beash) or a conventional (mainstream) designation (e.g. Gypsy, cigany). Furthermore, such identities are not necessarily mutually exclusive and also many Roma embrace a “majority” identity (e.g. Hungarian, Romanian).

The key moment in the spread of Roma identity came in 1971 with the meeting of the first World Romani Congress. Composed of activists and academics, the Congress declared *Roma* to be the preferred identity, as well as adopting symbols of nationhood including a flag and an anthem (Gelem, Gelem). However, it was not until the fall of Communism that *Roma* came into wider public consciousness and increasingly accepted by communities that had previously not explicitly identified themselves as such. The spread of Roma identity is an ongoing process, which is driven, in part, by the increasingly widespread adoption of the identity in public, political, and policy discourses.

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There are a number of notable aspects to Roma identity. First, being derived from an authentic communal name and rooted in a key cultural marker (Romani), it is considered to have greater legitimacy than conventional labels, such as Gypsy, which were created and applied by mainstream society. Second, in post-communist countries, the adoption of *Roma* has been a way of signalling a break with previous regimes' policies of integration through assimilation, i.e. the abandonment of any distinctive minority identity, and part of helping to redefine Roma as an ethnic minority rather than a socio-economic category. Third, in the context of European integration, *Roma* provides an inclusive collective identity that transcends numerous communal and national designations and allows for the assertion of Roma as a single, transnational people or ethnic group. Therefore, it is important to recognise that *Roma* is a dynamic identity, a work in progress, and is primarily a political identity.

## **Emergent Roma Political Activism**

While the spread of Roma identity is an interesting phenomenon itself, it is also a symptom of an even more significant feature of the situation today – the emergence of Roma political activism. Roma identity can be seen as a “rebranding” of communities that have been part of European societies since the late Middle Ages and so who have long had relationships with wider society and with mainstream authorities. Often these relationships have been antagonistic, oppressive and sometimes murderous.

Across the centuries, the historical record presents Roma as the objects of actions and laws, absent from decision-making and silently subject to the power of private or public authorities. Our information about “Roma” people in the past is heavily distorted by the nature of the written record. There have probably always been community leaders, *vajda* etc. operating, to some degree or other, at the interface between the community and the wider world, but it is only from the start of the twentieth century that we find a small but growing number of Roma intellectuals and organisations engaging in some form of public political activity.

This has now changed, and irrevocably so. Over the last two decades, there has been an explosion in Roma political activity. Perhaps the single most important factor has been changes within Roma communities themselves. Access to formal education has allowed for a growing number of Roma to perceive of and present themselves as representatives, challenge discrimination and assert the validity and value of Roma culture and identity. At the same time, modernisation greatly intensified the ties between Roma people and the state in respect of housing, education, employment and welfare, etc. In other words, Roma people have had to engage with public authorities for the basic necessities of life, as well as becoming increasingly willing and able to do so.

The other key factor lies in changes within mainstream society. The rise of the modern state and society, growing populations and the more intensive use of land and labour have required states to engage ever more deeply with Roma communities, whether in terms of limiting space for nomads, service provision or incorporating Roma into national economies. This engagement has manifested itself in many ways, from attempts to understand the circumstances and needs of Roma people, the creation of opportunities for upward economic and social mobility, legal coercion, containment, discrimination, and even genocide. Today, a plethora of nominally supportive and inclusive approaches towards Roma coexists with forms of segregation and exclusion. At the same time, (traditionally conservative and paternalistic) mainstream interest in Roma has become explicitly politicised and sought to promote respect for Roma culture and identity (minority rights), political empowerment and the struggle against racism and discrimination.

Over the last twenty years, unprecedented opportunities have been made available by states and civil society for Roma political activism and self-organisation, resulting in a remarkable rise in the number of Roma people actively engaged in public life. This process both draws on and itself increases Roma political consciousness. For the first time in centuries, Roma people (too) are now active players in public debates about themselves and

the traditionally one-sided relationship between authorities and Roma people has changed forever.

## Challenges

The fact that increasing numbers of Roma people now actively participate in public life, at all levels, is an amazing and welcome historical development that offers previously unheard of opportunities for overcoming centuries of neglect and discrimination and for European societies to show that they can provide for, and include, even their most disadvantaged citizens. However, opportunities still have to be taken, which means appreciating the challenges that still exist if this potential is to be realised.

One of these challenges is the weakness of Roma political activism itself. We are still only at the very early stages of what will be a feature of European politics for decades to come. Inevitably, the novelty of Roma politics means that it lacks the depth of experience and skills, the ideological sophistication and organisational structures of better established political “movements”. Reflecting the extensive influence of external funding, most Roma organisations are top-down structures lacking mass support or a significant element of democratic accountability.

Though the inclusive application of Roma identity gives the impression of coherence, in reality Roma people are not politically united. Traditionally, communities have often been in competition with each other, spatial dispersion and differing interests, social and cultural characteristics (both within and between countries) further undermine political cooperation. There is also considerable ambivalence about the value and implications of explicit ethnic politics and the potential this may have for alienating Roma people from non-Roma and from their national identity and citizenship. Of course, these are not necessarily incompatible and as Roma political thinking and experience develops there will be a more sophisticated articulation of how Roma identity can be integrated into the wider political world.

Another challenge lies in the complexity and ambiguities of Roma as a policy paradigm. In post-communist countries, the effects of transition to a market economy have had a devastating impact

on the living standards and opportunities of many Roma people, most notably structural unemployment and the capacity of public services to meet their needs. Throughout Europe there are unresolved questions regarding the inclusion within mainstream systems of Roma who also wish to preserve particular communal and cultural characteristics. While governments explicitly support inclusion and many have chosen to target policy at Roma, there still remain profound problems in terms of delivering equality of opportunity. Indeed, the very creation of Roma as a policy area can have the affect of disconnecting Roma people and their issues from mainstream policy tools and processes, leaving Roma policy a high profile topic, but one about which there is no real clarity (or accountability) about what should be achieved and how.

The third major challenge lies with the legacy of the past. Anti-Roma prejudices are widespread and deeply rooted in all European societies. Anti-Gypsyism is fundamentally different from postcolonial racism, which can be explained in a way that is relatively easy for people to grasp intellectually and whose origins can be seen as located in a defined period in the past. Hostility towards Roma has been around for longer and is little understood, not least as the history of “Roma” in Europe is still largely unknown. Furthermore, prejudices about Roma take many different forms, including seemingly positive generalisations and Romantic ethno-essentialism. It should also be recognised that in many states the mass ejection of Roma from the labour market and their heightened needs for support just when the capacity of the state has declined has meant that discrimination against Roma has become functional as a means of rationing resources and marginalising the claims of some of the most disadvantaged members of society.

There is also the essential competitiveness of politics. Projecting the Roma as a distinct interest group inevitably produces some degree of reaction from elements in society that perceive Roma as potential rivals for attention and resources. In states that have a particular sensitivity in respect of national identity, the image of Roma as a growing transnational people allows Roma assertiveness to be seen as a threat to the majority nation, providing an

ideological “legitimacy” to anti-Roma prejudice. More fundamentally, the lack of consensus about how to deal with objective problems of poverty and exclusion means that debate about Roma is often more emotional and less evidence-based than should be the case. Though it might be attractive to hope that Roma issues could be dealt with in terms of universal rights, national interest and even in a non-partisan manner, in practice Roma is often a polarising subject of public debate.

## **Progressive support for Roma People and Politics**

Roma people are just that – people, citizens of the society in which they live, the development of whom, both individually and collectively, is in large part conditioned by the opportunities and limitations determined by the circumstances in which they live. Today, these circumstances are increasingly mediated through politics, in which for the first time in centuries Roma people themselves are starting to play an active part.

Roma politics contains both inclusive and exclusive tendencies. It represents demands for respect for human dignity and universal rights, anti-racism and for society to transcend past prejudices and inequalities. It can also be nationalistic, deeply conservative and encourage ethnic fragmentation. Among non-Roma, it can inspire hope and motivate to fight for a better future, but it also produces reactions of fear and contempt. Roma politics has changed the relationship between Roma, the state and society forever and is here to stay – but how?

As Roma politics evolves, Roma activists will explore a wide range of possibilities. Ultimately, the direction(s) it takes will depend on the degree to which it is supported or rejected by mainstream political forces. Roma activists need allies and alliances based on mutual respect and shared interests. This is more easily said than done and it can require time and patience (and a willingness to learn) to develop the quality of relationship that can form the basis of successful political cooperation. Progressive political organisations need to be open to Roma activists and the people and issues they represent, and take responsibility for the implications of working with Roma, such as

ensuring that expectations are realistic and protecting the vulnerable. In countries with large and growing Roma populations, the need to develop successful political relationships with Roma people is an existential necessity for parties that aspire for greater equality and social cohesion.

## Conclusion

In recent years, considerable attention has been given to the rapid rise of Roma issues up the political agenda across Europe. However, of even greater significance is the historical emergence of Roma people as active political agents. Roma people are being compelled to politicise in order to secure the necessities of modern life and the protections they are entitled to, and are increasingly capable of doing so. The long-term impact of Roma politics on mainstream politics remains to be seen, but if progressive political forces do not take account of the politicisation of Roma people and identity, reactionary ones will.

## Recommendations

- It is important to recognise that Roma identity is a dynamic political label. In respect of actions aimed at social and economic inclusion, it can be a means to an end, but not an end in itself.
- The emergence of Roma activism provides an unprecedented opportunity for states and societies to understand and address the needs and aspirations of Roma people. Therefore, the political inclusion of Roma should be an essential element of social and economic inclusion initiatives.
- The creation of Roma as a policy paradigm has raised the public profile of Roma people and their issues. However, policymakers should be sensitive to the possibility that unless Roma policy can deliver tangible results in terms of reducing poverty, unemployment and exclusion, it may become a means of further dividing Roma from non-Roma and entrenching prejudice and discrimination.



As it grows, Roma political activity should be encouraged to develop in an inclusive and democratic manner, and supported by political relationships based on respect and dialogue in local, national and European contexts.

# La France et les Roms



**Michel Rocard**

La France vient de se rendre une nouvelle fois célèbre pour de mauvaises raisons : un conflit à propos des Roms a occupé l'actualité au deuxième semestre 2010.

C'est une bien ancienne affaire, et malheureusement très complexe.

La première raison de cette complexité, c'est qu'on ne sait pas très bien de quoi on parle.

Beaucoup de rapports, de textes, d'enquêtes et de lois, mélangent diverses catégories et emploient le mot « Roms » comme une appellation générique regroupant Tziganes, gens du voyage, Sintis, Ashkalis, Kalès et Roms.

J'ai été maire d'une ville de 30 000 habitants dans la Région Parisienne pendant 18 ans et j'ai beaucoup travaillé pour et à propos de cette population.

J'appelais mes interlocuteurs « gens du voyage », il s'y reconnaissaient. Il était pour moi implicite que c'était des Roms. Or quelques spécialistes plus sérieusement informés insistent sur la différence entre les gens du voyage, authentiques nomades, et les Roms, sédentaires contrariés aux déplacements fréquents, et dont le traitement doit être différent.

Dans l'acception la plus large, il y aurait 10 à 12 millions de Roms dans l'ensemble de l'Union Européenne, ce qui en fait la minorité ethnique la plus importante de l'UE. La quasi totalité sont ressortissants d'un État membre de l'UE, ils en sont donc citoyens.

Ils ont à ce titre les mêmes droits et les mêmes responsabilités que tous les autres.

L'arrivée de Tziganes en France remonte au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ils y furent d'abord plutôt bien tolérés. C'est au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle que l'intolérance s'affirme.

D'abord interdits d'accueil dans les châteaux, où pourtant l'on appréciait leurs danses, puis exclus des compagnies de gens d'armes, chassés des villes, ils se voient interdire les activités légales mais itinérantes. Une décision de Louis XIV en 1682 ordonne d'envoyer les hommes aux galères à perpétuité en dehors de tout délit constaté. Pendant les XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle ils sont soumis à des exigences de domiciliation et de contrôle.

En 1895, un recensement général de tous les « nomades, bohémiens, vagabonds » aboutit à la création d'un fichier global, lequel permet la création par la loi en 1912 du « Carnet anthropométrique des nomades » obligatoire dès l'âge de 13 ans. Pendant la guerre de 14-18, un très grand nombre de nomades furent arrêtés et internés, parfois pour 6 ans.

Durant la seconde guerre mondiale, l'occupant nazi, comme partout ailleurs en Europe, en fit arrêter et déporter un très grand nombre vers les camps d'extermination. Six mille autres furent internés par familles entières pour toute la durée de la guerre dans trente camps gérés par les autorités françaises.

Ce n'est qu'en 1969 que la loi remplaça le carnet anthropométrique par un livret de circulation beaucoup moins vexatoire, mais néanmoins contraire au droit européen (Convention européenne des Droits de l'Homme de 1963 établissant la liberté de circuler et de choisir sa résidence).

L'autre élément de la complexité du problème tient au caractère très robuste de la culture du nomadisme et de la marginalité. Et les cultures des différents peuples rassemblés sous cette dénomination commune peuvent différer selon les lieux d'origine (roumains, bulgares, autres...) les langues, les pratiques religieuses, et l'intensité plus ou moins grande du nomadisme dans leur culture. Cela rend très difficile aussi bien leur sédentarisation que leur intégration véritable.

C'est sous l'autorité de François Mitterrand qu'une loi de gauche, dans les années 1980, sur l'initiative du grand ministre du logement, Louis Besson, fait obligation aux villes de plus de 5 000 habitants d'aménager une aire d'accueil. 20% seulement ont été réalisées. Beaucoup de villes résistent fortement.

Cela veut dire que le problème de l'accueil des Roms n'a toujours pas de solution locale satisfaisante. Dans ces conditions, les efforts, timides en France, beaucoup plus nets dans les institutions européennes, d'humanisation relative de la législation se heurtent à de très grandes difficultés d'application. Certains Maires, certains Préfets, certaines unités de police continuent à faire preuve d'une grande brutalité que de plus en plus le gouvernement central dénonce.

La France vit donc le « Problème Rom » dans un équilibre instable, embarrassé, profondément insatisfaisant et fertile en incidents. La résistance à l'application de la loi Besson demeure, et c'est la raison majeure de ces difficultés. Dans ces conditions, l'impulsion donnée par le Gouvernement et plus encore par le Président de la République lui-même, prend une importance décisive.

Or l'actuel Président, Nicolas Sarkozy, professe une philosophie nettement plus sécuritaire que ses prédécesseurs. Affaire de conviction pour une part certaine, affaire de séduction de l'électorat d'extrême droite, sécuritaire et répressif par nature pour une autre part, cette attitude s'est exprimée à de nombreuses reprises. Les tenants d'une politique sévèrement répressive se sentent ainsi confirmés.

C'est dans ces conditions que le 5 août 2010, Monsieur Michel Bart, Directeur du Cabinet du Ministre de l'Intérieur a signé une circulaire aux Préfets prescrivant la suppression des implantations sauvages de campements de nomades et précise explicitement que les Roms sont visés en priorité.

Cette circulaire est à l'évidence contraire à la Constitution Française, en même temps qu'à la législation européenne.

Cela a provoqué de nombreux incidents publics. La Commissaire Européenne, Viviane Reding a exprimé fortement sa désapprobation, le Président français et plusieurs ministres s'en sont pris à elle, Messieurs Barroso et Juncker leur ont fermement répondu, la circulaire a été retirée, mais le problème demeure.

Les derniers incidents sont donc français, mais le problème n'a guère de meilleures solutions ailleurs, tout le monde en est très empêtré, à commencer bien sûr par la Roumanie.

Les institutions européennes, et notamment le Parlement, où siègent deux députées Roms, sont assurément le lieu où les droits des minorités sont les mieux défendus.

Le fait que les droits de l'homme sont les mêmes pour tous, et qu'aucune sévérité sélective n'a place dans le Droit européen est efficacement et vigoureusement rappelé, c'est nécessaire et c'est bien ainsi. Mais les autorités européennes n'ont nulle part compétence en matière d'ordre public, et ne sont pas directement élues. La tension ne peut que demeurer.

Il est clair qu'une politique précise d'accueil et d'aide à l'insertion des Roms doit être définie. Il la faut globale et massive, et elle sera coûteuse : c'est une population nombreuse. Définir une telle politique doit se faire à partir d'une connaissance approfondie de leurs cultures, et donc dans le cadre d'une négociation détaillée avec leurs représentants.

Débarassée de la servitude des incidents quotidiens, l'Europe aurait là un champ d'action opportun. Il faut consentir à ce problème plus d'attention et d'efforts qu'il n'en a reçus jusqu'à présent.

# S&D Group Roma Activities in the Present Term of the European Parliament

After having devoted a lot of political energy to the Roma issue in previous years, the S&D Group set up in November 2009 a “Roma Task Force” aiming to create a synergy of the different Group activities related to the Roma policies, as well as to coordinate the various activities. The task force is chaired by Vice Presidents Monika Flašíková-Beňová and Hannes Swoboda.

Since autumn 2009, our Roma task force has organised/ contributed to and participated in the following activities:

- Working dinner in Brussels with representatives of civil society dealing with Roma issues (February 2010).
- Seminar organised by the Open Society Institute on “Europe needs a strategy to fight the exclusion and discrimination of Roma” (March 2010).
- Launched an oral question with resolution on Roma in preparation of the Second European Roma Summit (March 2010).
- S&D Group Members attended the Second European Roma Summit (7-8 April, Cordoba). Prior to the summit our Group organised, in cooperation with PSOE, various activities, including a debate with Young Roma and an exchange of views with George Soros.
- S&D Members – in cooperation with the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity – visited a Roma community in Belgrade (Serbia) on 16 April 2010. The second part of the day was dedicated to a conference entitled “Strategies for Roma political inclusion in the Western Balkans”.

- A letter sent by the Group leadership to the Serbian authorities condemning the forced eviction of Roma in Belgrade.
- The S&D Group organised the conference “Roma, a European reality” with among others Commissioner László Andor as speaker.
- The S&D Group was, in September 2010, the main political force in the European Parliament that promoted and supported the adoption of the Resolution with debate on the Roma expulsions from France.
- In order to better understand and analyse the realities specific to the Roma communities in Europe, the S&D Group held a discussion on this topic together with experts, during the Group meeting in Budapest in November 2010.
- A series of fact finding missions was initiated in November 2010 in the EU member states that have large Roma communities or are faced with the specificity of Roma immigrants. Members visited Roma communities in Slovakia, Hungary, France and Romania.

## The S&D Group's Recommendations

- Give priority to the inclusion of the Roma at the national and the European level
- Develop a comprehensive long-term EU Roma strategy: Claim a leading role for the EU to coordinate existing instruments and the exchange of best practice and taking responsibility to monitor and benchmark progress at the European and national level in order to help break the vicious circle of poverty, exclusion and discrimination
- Place the Roma community – explicitly but not exclusively – at the heart of the anti-poverty initiatives of the EU 2020 strategy, in particular regarding the Inclusive Growth Pillar
- Include mechanisms to make sure EU Structural Funds available for Roma projects reach the Roma in reality, and take into account the Ten Common Basic Principles of Roma Inclusion. Make the tendering procedures simpler and aim at sustainable projects and programmes. Increase the capacity of the European Commission to finance directly Roma related activities
- Ensure that the Treaties and the European anti-discrimination and anti-racism legislation are applied in all member states in the fight against anti-Gypsyism; Address human rights violations both against and within Roma communities; Adequately resource organisations, that specialise in gender equality and human rights
- Reduce the differences of income between East and West, but also within regions in a country
- Build concrete programmes to be part of the national integration strategies to improve access to housing, health care, education, and the labour market
- Invest in active citizenship and in cooperation between authorities, NGO's, the private sector and grassroots organisations to increase Roma participation and make it sustainable



- Define indicators for Roma inclusion focusing on achieving “community cohesion” and equal and better life chances
- Collect better quantitative and qualitative data on discrimination and inclusion
- Engage with the wider community, Roma and non-Roma, to illustrate the benefits of inclusive communities with Roma as equal members of society.

The German Nobel Prize Laureate Günter Grass calls the Roma a blind spot in the consciousness of Europe and George Soros, founder and president of the Open Society Foundations, warns us of the danger of the creation of a permanent underclass if Europe does not act more vigorously to tackle the problems of its largest minority. The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament wants to contribute to the debate about the best way forward with regard to the Roma. In view of the presentation of the EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, the authors, Roma and non-Roma, in particular look at the role of the EU from many different angles. They all underline the need for better mutual understanding in and between communities. Not the Roma are the problem, but the inability of our societies to deal with cultural diversity.

*Roma: A European Minority* is part of a series of publications of the S&D Group in which politicians, experts and academics present their points of view.

