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## Roma politicians Influence on Political Processes

A history of persecution in the modern period - the Balkans as a bone of contention and the Roma in the middle

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Anti- antiziganism on the part of European society is at the root of all the ills that plight. Without knowledge of its nature we will never be able to tackle the problems which face Roma. Nonetheless, we need a deeper knowledge of the nature of this phenomenon. What is **antiziganism**? Is it fear, phobia, racism or something deeper and more destructive? First of all we must properly define the problem we are facing with, and to use it as definition and to insist to all other members in society to recognize it as such in order to be properly addressed later when it occurs. It is unfiltered by the majority society as phenomenon which distinguish and discriminate the others "individuals or groups" which are not majority population, in the case Roma, on race origin. In Europe you have 12 to 15 million people neglected and ignored by a society, but they are the largest European minority. Because of Antiziganism, the Roma in all of Europe lack the protection of their basic democratic rights, especially the right for equal treatment, which should be codified in every democratic constitution. The Roma population is identified in almost every European country and in 1993 in Resolution 1203 of Council of Europe (text adopted by the Assembly on 2 February 1993, 24 sitting) by the Council of Europe they were declared to be " a true European minority", but as a specific entity they are faced with issues related to basic human rights and needs as human beings. The right to non-discrimination is recognised *inter alia* by the main international instruments, but still Roma are excluded from all ongoing processes of integration, they do not have

basic right to life, as now the example of refugees from the Balkan region or deportation of Roma from Western Europe countries. Although, the European and the world policies with their declarations, political statements and covenants have promoted and are still striving for equal status of the Roma community, in reality it is not seen. The Roma people are still the most discriminated entity, whereas in many cases they are even ignored by the non-Roma and the representatives of the state institutions.

The war conflicts during the period of collapsing of former Yugoslavia from Croatia over Bosnia, to Kosovo, and Macedonia as well brought about painful situation for the Roma community and their recovery will take time. The situation infers to split the Roma identity through their declaring as members to some groups, such as Ashkali, Egyptians, and there might be some new ones these days... More than half a million Roma from former Yugoslavia (mostly from Kosovo) left their homes where they were living more than 100 years. This has led to another blocking of the Roma inclusion process in the Balkans. **I wonder why the Roma are victims of wars which they didn't cause!**

The great Yugoslavia existed for 73 years, and the "little One" (SRJ) at least 10 years. There were many wars on this territory: 1991-Slovenia, 1992-Croatia, 1992-Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1999-Kosovo, 2001-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Today the results from those changes brought to the creation of 6 new states: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and FYR of Macedonia, as well as the already started process for the final status of Kosovo. This is one of the reasons why the Roma refugees migrated in different places around former SFRJ, in Europe and around the World. The number of Roma living on Kosovo before the war was estimated by some Roma refugees from Kosovo and Serbia to about 100,000-150,000 people. The 1991 census came up with the number of 45,000 Roma. Today many of the Roma settlements have disappeared, their homes have been taken away, their houses burnt and destroyed. Hundreds of RAE (Roma/Ashkali, Egyptians), but most of them Roma still live on Kosovo in temporary refugee camps near the mine of Trepca, Kosovska Mitrovica (in the camps Zitkovac, Leposavic), camp Plementina near Obilic. In the camp of Plementina near Obilic in 1999 there were 1200 refugee families, whereas in 2005 their number got down to 114 families with 466 members, the rest have left

the camp because of the very poor living conditions. The Roma refugees in Croatia haven't got their status determined yet. Many of them are not included in the statistic database, and they cannot get asylum due to failure to meet legal criteria. The latest case in Slovenia, as part of EU, where in Ambrus family of Roma, who have Slovenian citizenship, were maltreated by the majority Slovenians and evicted from their home. In Slovenia and throughout Europe, Roma are discriminated against. If the expulsion of the Strojans, living in Ambrus for decades and owners of the place they were living in for 12 years, was a trauma for the family, it was also an increasingly routine example of the epidemic of forced evictions of Roma settlements across the European Union. Slovenia till, now did not solve the problem with this Roma family. The refugees from Kosovo are still in Macedonia.

Just imagine you have been the victims of an inter-ethnic war which was not yours, hat your house has been destroyed or occupied by others and that you have been "temporarily" placed in a camp north of Mitrovica, Kosovo – if not in a lead- polluted area – and that six years later you are still living there, or even dying, you and your family, from lead without any major assistance.

Nevertheless, inadequate or non-existent data collection is a profound problem when attempting to gauge the extent and nature of racist violence and crime, track the level and extent of racial discrimination, in order to design informed policies and measure implementation. Without appropriate data and information it becomes very difficult to target policy effectively, measure its impact and monitor any progress.

What has to be done in order to change this situation?

1) Policy formulation and implementation requires a more comprehensive approach and greater involvement of affected communities. Better monitoring and regular review needs to be built into the process and acted upon. Trust is central to this process and so are legal safeguards.

2) We will only succeed in improving policy implementation when Roma issues are mainstreamed, that means being treated, not just with specific programmes and actions, but also as a part of the general framework of European, national and local policies. This requires political will and taking the good arguments about public policy interest from the capitals to the local authorities who actually deal with the issues on the ground. Here all governments have a responsibility and there are examples of good initiatives which can be used.

3) A different approach based on inclusion, dignity, respect for difference and equality, is needed in our societies. Anti-antiziganism goes beyond the classic forms of discrimination. It is historically rooted, mixed with prejudice towards Roma that some people in society have inherited from generation to generation. It is based on the fear of the "perceived foreign", anxiety and hate.

We have among us many of those who are in a position to influence policy implementation. We need the courage and commitment of political leaders across the EU and new coalitions between politicians, employers, teachers and many others in order to overcome racism, discrimination and exclusion, anti-antiziganism. The old Greeks have defined policy as skill for wise govern, now we are faced with policy as arena for interests, not as field of common interests.

Thank you for your attention.