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### EDITORIAL

In this issue, we continue to promote and encourage co-operation between the ODIHR' Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues and other international organisations working in this field. We would like to introduce the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) - a private institution which, apart from its own activities, is supporting one of the Contact Point's projects, the CPRSI Internship Programme. Excerpts from a report written by CPRSI Intern Angela Kocze, the third Roma Intern - after Nicolas Jimenez and Nicoleta Bitu - whose stay in Warsaw was sponsored by the PER, are contained in this issue.

You can read in this Newsletter about the Round Table discussion, organised in Bulgaria, for the members of Roma community and the Ministry of Interior officials. We present you also a new publication, produced recently by the European Roma Rights Center. Report that were recently submitted to the Contact Point are also listed, as usual.

We wish you pleasant reading!

## **THE PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS**

### **Livia Plaks and Lucia Acosta**

The Project on Ethnic Relations is a U.S.-based private organisation, founded in 1991 to encourage the peaceful resolution of ethnic conflicts in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation. PER conducts programmes of action, education, research, and publication in Central and Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation. PER Principals are Allen H. Kassof, President and Livia B. Plaks, Executive Director.

PER pays particular attention to issues concerning the Roma. The Roma are the most disadvantaged population in Europe according to all of the important indicators: education, opportunity, income and employment. The problem is especially acute in Central Europe and the Balkans, where previous governments sought to homogenize their populations, rather than pursue public awareness and tolerance of diversity. Although the governments in the region are now more willing to view this situation as serious, it is nevertheless true that little progress has been made in either addressing or resolving the basic issues facing the Roma.

Although international pressure on governments can play a vital role in ameliorating ethnic prejudice and discrimination, PER believes that active engagement with governmental authorities, as well as the promotion of projects that would facilitate the development of Roma communities, are of equal importance.

### **THE ROMA ADVISORY COUNCIL**

In 1993, PER formed the Roma Advisory Council (PERRAC), consisting of leading members of the young Roma intelligentsia who act as an advisory group to PER. PERRAC not only advises PER on its Roma programmes, but has the broader purpose of providing to a group that has the standing and vocal presence to deal with governmental authorities in the region in interpreting and articulating the needs of the Roma.

PERRAC Mandate:

1. To advise PER on issues related to Roma communities in central and eastern Europe (to act as a "think tank").
2. To provide a clear and authoritative voice for the Roma community in addressing international organisations on issues related to the communities in central and eastern Europe.
3. To provide advice to governments in the region during crises involving the Roma communities; and likewise, to advise governments on how to possibly avert crisis situations involving Roma communities.
4. To provide documentation/research and information to governments and international organisations concerned with the question of Roma communities.

5. To organise seminars on issues such as violence prevention, refugees, migration and education.

The chairman of PERRAC is Andrzej Mirga of Poland. Other PERRAC members include: Nicolae Gheorge, Romania; Ian Hancock, USA; Orhan Galjus, currently living in Slovakia, originally from Kosovo, Yugoslavia; Klara Orgovanova, Slovakia; Hristo Kyuchukov, Bulgaria; Marcel Cortiade, France, currently living in Albania; and Nadezhda Demeter, Russia.

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF PER ACTIVITIES INVOLVING THE ROMA**

Below are some of the highlights of PER's past activities with the Roma communities:

\* A conference in Stupava, Slovakia, in May 1992, for the first time brought together representatives of governments in the region with Roma leaders for a discussion of issues of mutual concern. A follow-up meeting took place in May 1993 in Snagov, Romania.

\* In February 1994, as a follow up to these meetings, PER organised a mission in Romania for the purpose of preventing mob violence against the Roma. The team met with chiefs-of-police and prosecutors at the national and local levels to discuss patterns of ethnic violence and to evaluate preventive measures, and came up with practical recommendations based upon their findings. One result of this mission has been work with the Romanian police, described later in this article.

\* In April 1994, PER brought four Roma community leaders from Central and Eastern Europe to Washington to testify before the House Subcommittee on International Security, International Organisations, and Human Rights. The hearing, entitled "Human Rights Abuses of Roma/Gypsies," featured testimony from Nicolae Gheorge from Romania; Klara Orgovanova from Slovakia, Andrzej Mirga from Poland, and Ian Hancock from the United States. The testimony followed a series of meetings with congressional personnel and officials from the U.S. State Department, as well as from several U.S. institutions and foundations, including the Carnegie Corporation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Human Rights Watch/Helsinki.

## **ONGOING ACTIVITIES WITH THE ROMA**

PER continues to contribute to confidence-building measures with special regard to the Roma/Gypsy communities in Central and Eastern Europe. For the past three years in Romania, the Project on Ethnic Relations has been engaged in an ongoing effort in which senior police officers at the local level, together with the central police hierarchy, have introduced new programmes for managing ethnic tensions. The principal minority involved in these efforts is the Roma, given their singular status as Romania's most disadvantaged and marginalised ethnic group. PER has established relations between the central police and Romani CRISS, and has held workshops in which members of Romani CRISS and the Young Roma Association joined participated in problem-solving exercises with police

commanders. PER also works with the police to set up departments of prevention in various areas of the country, and is now involved in the creation of a joint Romanian-American Democratic Police Management Institute, addressing issues of ethnic conflict with particular emphasis on managing a society and a police force in transition.

The media have proven to be a major contributor to ethnic tensions in Central and Eastern Europe. The Project on Ethnic Relations in 1994 initiated a program of dialogue between representatives of the Romanian and ethnic Hungarian media in Transylvania, Romania. A second project, the Press Monitor, is responsible for the monitoring of the local and national press with regard to the treatment of interethnic relations during the 1996 election campaign. Periodic monitoring bulletins, as well as quarterly reports are circulated among the media and the political community, and are discussed publicly. The Press Monitor Project is run by professional journalists, with the monitors being of Romanian, Hungarian, and Romani origin. Some 40 teams are located throughout the country.

PER has also been involved in the training of mediators among ethnic groups, especially among the Roma. With the assistance of the U.S. Department of Justice, PER held training seminars which attracted substantial interest from the Roma communities. The training introduced specific mediation techniques, and involved case studies that allowed participants, through role plays, to practice applying these techniques.

Education of the general public about the Roma for the purpose of encouraging co-operation at the local level, is also on PER's agenda. Thus, with the Roma Union of Tirgu Mures County, Romania, PER organised a seminar entitled "We Are Known, But Do You Know Us?" Leading representatives of the Roma community in Romania, representatives of the Hungarian and Polish Roma communities, as well as local authorities, discussed issues of concern to the Roma, especially those of violence prevention, employment and education.

In December, 1995, PER organised a meeting between the Romanian Ministry of Education and Romani organisations to establish a process of direct co-operation with regard to schooling for Romani children. This meeting has led to subsequent consultations between the parties involved.

### **INTERNSHIPS AT THE CPRSI**

In March 1995, an informal consultation between representatives from Roma NGOs, the Council of Europe, and the Offices of the OSCE, HCNM, and UNHCR, took place upon the invitation of the ODIHR. The aim of the meeting was the elaboration of guidelines for the activities of the CPRSI, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, in 1995. Among the decisions reached was that of having regular internships in the CPRSI for representatives of Roma NGOs. Internships would allow for the training of new leaders in the Roma community, and for the development of their diplomatic and administrative skills.

PER agreed to initially support this internship training programme for two interns in 1995, and subsequently agreed to support two more in 1996. The Romani intern is sponsored for three months at the ODIHR office to work on a previously approved research project, as well as to help with other duties at that office.

To date, PER has sponsored three interns: Nicolas Jimenez, of Spain; Nicoleta Bitu, of Romania; and Angela Kocze of Hungary. The most recent intern, who began in September, is Rumyan Russinov, of Bulgaria.

Nicolas Jimenez is a sociologist and vice-president of Asociacion Nacional Presencia Gitana, a Spanish Romani NGO established in 1972. During his internship, Mr. Jimenez conducted sociological research on the present structures and activity programmes of Romani, Sinti and Traveler NGOs in the OSCE region. The aim of the study was to update an overview of the Romani associations.

The Romanian intern, Nicoleta Bitu, studied social work at Bucharest University, and worked as a full time staff member at Romani CRISS. During her internship, Ms. Bitu worked on a report on Roma human rights violations, with particular attention to violence and conflicts in Roma communities in the OSCE region.

Angela Kocze studied sociology at Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest, in the Ethnic and Minority Studies Master's Degree Program. In the course of her internship, Ms. Kocze examined the plight of the Roma in the judicial system. The study looked at current legal remedies for harmed Roma in several East European countries, namely Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Republics. The report was based on a questionnaire distributed to the various legal programmes for the Roma, on personal interviews with representatives of the programmes, and on documents collected from the ODIHR and other human rights NGOs.

The current intern, Rumyan Russinov of Bulgaria, will examine the role of the media in reporting on the Roma.

### **UPCOMING PER ACTIVITIES WITH THE ROMA**

Forthcoming projects with the Roma communities include: a) a policy paper on the Roma in the 21st century, being prepared by Andrzej Mirga (Chairman, PER Roma Advisory Council) and Nicolae Gheorghe (member, PER Council for Ethnic Accord and member, PER Roma Advisory Council); b) a workshop in the Czech Republic with the Romani media; c) a seminar aimed at evaluating one year of Roma self-government in Hungary; d) continuation of the aforementioned projects on police training; and e) a meeting in October in co-operation with the government of Bulgaria and Bulgarian Roma associations to evaluate social policies and programmes for Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe.

PER has co-operated in the past with the Council of Europe, ODIHR, the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the OSCE, and with the European Parliament. The Project on Ethnic Relations stands ready to continue its co-operation with these institutions in an effort to improve the status of the Roma communities in Europe.

**PER - ROMA ADVISORY COUNCIL (PERRAC)**  
**Andrzej Mirga, Chairman**

PER has been involved in Roma issues since 1991. PER's general mandate and experience in the prevention of deadly conflict and ethnic violence has extended to Roma issues in Eastern and Central Europe. In working with the Roma, PER has followed its previous approach, which has aimed at: the opening of channels of communication between confrontational parties; the use of independent experts; maintaining a focus on problem solving strategies; and working on the practical and technical aspects of the implementation of solutions. In keeping with this approach, two large and pioneering international meetings have taken place: the first in Stupava, Slovakia, in May 1992, and the second in Snagov, Romania, in May 1993. Both meetings were aimed at initiating open, direct and unconditional dialogue between the Roma and government officials, with the assistance of independent experts. An additional outcome of these meetings was the formation of the PER Roma Advisory Council, PERRAC.

PERRAC was founded under the auspices of PER in 1993, with an advisory and "lobbying" role as its main mandate. In and of itself, PERRAC is not an NGO and is not aimed at leading grass-roots projects. Its members, however, are responsible for the shaping of PER activities in the field of Roma issues. Of greatest importance is the use by PERRAC's Roma members of their PER position, as well as the facilities available to them through PER, to lobby in the field of Roma politics. The work of PERRAC has been important and successful, though such is not always visible. Since PERRAC does not have a formal structure, its members enjoy independence, and are free to pursue their own interests and develop activities in other structures. PER is also interested in strengthening PERRAC's position through sponsorship of its activities. The most visible and important personalities of the Roma communities are active in PERRAC, which, given its informal structure, is still open for others to join.

Lobbying by PERRAC members has been a long-term activity sponsored by PER. The first and most important of these activities took place in 1994, when four PERRAC members (Klara Orgovanova, Nicolae Gheorghe, Ian Hancock and Andrzej Mirga) testified before the House Subcommittee on International Security, International Organisations and Human Rights of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the U.S. House of Representatives. PER has also facilitated the participation of PERRAC members and Roma leaders in a number of international meetings organised by the Council of Europe, OSCE and the European Union. PER AND PERRAC efforts at these meetings resulted in the creation of among other things, the CPRSI at the Warsaw ODIHR, the Roma Standing Conference, and the Specialist Group on Roma of the Council of Europe. PERRAC

members actively participated in the preparation of agendas and the wording of recommendations in a number of documents issued by these institutions.

PERRAC functions mainly as an advisory entity, and therefore its members help to define and prioritise PER's involvement in Roma issues. PER's agenda of Roma activities, the result of mutual inspiration and of a combination of PER's assets and PERRAC's competence in the field, has resulted in relevant projects and events. Among the most significant are:

- \* A mission to document mob violence against the Roma communities in Romania, organised by PER in February of 1994 with the participation of PERRAC members. An outcome of this mission was a series of seminars and meetings on police management in situations of ethnic violence, and effective police intervention to prevent violence.

- \* PER's establishment of a relationship between the central police and Roma organisations in Romania to jointly engage in problem-solving exercises.

- \* PER's sponsorship of young Roma interns at the CPRSI of the Warsaw ODIHR. Of great importance and relevance, the programme fosters pragmatic co-operation with the ODIHR of the OSCE, and offers young Roma opportunities for training and conducting research. Up to the present, three young Roma (for periods of three months each) have worked at the Warsaw office and have produced research reports.

- \* PER's assistance, through its PERRAC members, in the maintenance of the Roma Standing Conference as an integral political structure of the Roma in Europe, able to play a partnership role in relation to other international organisations.

Upcoming PER projects with the assistance and full involvement of PERRAC, include:

- \* A workshop for Roma Media (Prague, September 19-22).

- \* The preparation of a policy paper on the Roma in the 21st century, by Andrzej Mirga and Nicolae Gheorghe.

- \* A seminar evaluating one year of Roma self-government in Hungary.

Last, but not least, PER offers its PERRAC members a unique position and the possibility to work in partnership with the most influential actors in governmental and international bodies.

## THE ROMA OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: LEGAL REMEDIES OR INVISIBILITY?

Note from the editor:

In this issue we would like to introduce the background excerpts of the report that has come out as a result of the intern to the ODIHR' Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues Anegla Kocze's visit to Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary between March and May, 1996. The Project on Ethnic Relations has sponsored the Angela's internship in Warsaw and the ODIHR provided her with full access to any documents necessary for her work and financially supported her travels in the region.

The communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe, despite their claims to the contrary, did not eradicate nationalism within their societies. In fact, those regimes often employed policies which manipulated and exploited ethnic tensions for other purposes. Perhaps encouraged by those policies, the region has experienced a resurgence of violent ethnic conflict and racism in the post-communist era. The simultaneous occurrence of several factors accompanying the transition have also increased the potential for ethnic tensions. These include the enduring and profound economic problems resulting in competition for scarce resources, the ideological vacuum left by the decline of Marxism-Leninism, the elimination of restrictions on free speech and association, the end of Soviet political and military domination, and the tendency to scapegoat groups of people during difficult periods.

These and a host of other related phenomena have resulted in particularly difficult times for Central and Eastern Europe's largest ethnic minority, the Roma (Gypsies). This ethnic group is especially vulnerable in this region, where the recent economic liberalization has caused severe hardship. Furthermore, because the heretofore totalitarian controls of ethnic conflict have also dissolved, eruptions of ethnic conflict have become possible.

Without doubt, discrimination and racism have formed the underlying motivations for intolerance toward Roma in Central and Eastern European countries. It must be stressed, however, that it is not only within post-communist countries where Roma face intolerance and discrimination. A negative attitude toward Roma seems to be a common denominator throughout Europe. Throughout the region, Roma have been forced to endure racism and marginalization manifested both through open hostility or through indirect, quiet acts effecting their "removal" from the mainstream.

Racism is defined as the belief in the superiority of a particular race, and therefore tends to reinforce particular patterns of behaviour of the majority over the minority, the dominant over the weak. Racism can also be defined as prejudice plus power, and it is difficult to deny the existence of racist elements within the administrations of Central and Eastern European countries. In fact, racism in the region has become firmly institutionalized. Certain groups of citizens have automatic opportunities for success and security in life,

while other citizens must struggle for those same opportunities or have been denied access to them altogether. The dominant, racist population has established many race barriers. The result is that those excluded from full participation in the system have come to feel like a surplus population - worthless and frustrated.

Clearly, racism does not merely consist of outright acts of violence or discrimination. Racism may also be structurally ingrained and may permeate a society's institutions. Many sociological studies indicate that race can be a factor, either directly or indirectly, for denying minorities access to education, housing and jobs. It is in this sense that the Central and Eastern European Roma face structural discrimination in many areas of society.

This structural discrimination has ensured that the Romani population has been effectively marginalized in European societies. "Marginalization" denotes a specific group's separation or isolation from other groups in society, and its exclusion from political, social, economic and cultural goods and services. Marginalization may be perpetuated by inaction on the part of the marginalized group or by persistent discriminatory policies and attitudes by the dominant group. Although state policies may unambiguously prohibit discrimination (or marginalization) of any sort, it may persist through commonly accepted views and attitudes.

When we speak about Romani communities, we are speaking of communities who have had little ability to defend themselves, and who are being harshly singled out and victimized by society.

### **ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS: AVOIDING CONFLICTS: INTERACTION BETWEEN POLICE AND THE ROMA COMMUNITY BASED ON RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

*Note from the editor: The information on the Round Table Discussions has been provided by the Human Rights Project, Bulgaria.*

On September 11 and 12, 1996 in the cities of Sliven and Pazardjik the Human Rights Project organized round table discussions on the topic: "Avoiding Conflicts: Interaction Between Police and the Roma Community Based on Respect for Human Rights." The initiative was supported by the Confidence Building Measures Programme of the Council of Europe. Participants in the discussion were members of the Human Rights Project, leaders of the national Roma organizations, Roma Union and Confederation of Roma in Bulgaria, representatives of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee; representatives of the Constitutional and Legislative Policy Institute; and representative from the press agency of the Ministry of Interior (MI), from the Directorate of National Police (DNP), and from the regional departments of the MI of Sliven and Pazardjik.

The major topics proposed for discussion by the Human Rights Projects were International human rights standards and policework; factfinding into allegations of human rights abuse against Roma, which the Human Rights Project conducts; and the role of the (police) pres agencies in alleviating ethnic tensions in Bulgaria.

The Human Rights Project addressed the participants, expressing concern about cases of human rights abuse against Roma, and presented to the participants factual information about such cases, which had been documented by the organization.

## **NEW PUBLICATIONS**

### **European Roma Rights Center Report**

The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), an international, non-governmental organisation combating human rights abuses against the Roma, announced the release of "Divide and Deport: Roma and Sinti in Austria." The report, written in close co-operation with local Romani organisations and human rights NGOs, focuses on the negative effects of a series of new laws on legal residence and asylum in Austria, which went into effect between 1991 and 1993. These laws, originally intended to prevent new immigration, empowered the Austrian authorities to deport a large group of legally-settled long-term Romani residents from Austria. They had the additional effect of providing tacit approval for the rise in public and vigilante anti-foreigner and anti-Romani discrimination and violence.

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## **REPORTS**

**Children of Bulgaria - Police Violence and Arbitrary Confinement**, Human Rights Watch, Children's Rights Project, September, 1996

**Divide and Deport: Roma and Sinti in Austria**, European Roma Rights Center, (ERRC), September, 1996

**France: L'Internement des Tsiganes, 1939- 1946**, Revue Semestrielle, 2/1996  
**L'Urbanite en Defaut - Eloge de L'Interstice**, Revue Semestrielle, Vol. 7, 1996

**Labor Education Schools and the Rights of Juveniles in Bulgaria**, Obiektiv -  
Newsletter of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Special Issue, 1996

**Roma People in Slovakia and in Europe**, Information and Documenation Centre of the  
Council of Europe, Bratislava, 1995