

**Challenges and trends within mass media concerning Roma and Sinti;  
the role of the media and of Roma organizations in countering prejudices and negative  
stereotypes and responding to intolerance directed at Roma and Sinti**

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- OSCE HDIM's Special Day on Roma and Sinti, Working Session 14, on the 5<sup>th</sup> October
- Side Event on Roma and the Media, 5<sup>th</sup> October

Distinguished participants at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting,  
Dear Colleagues,

Romania has 21.7 million people, according to the latest census, from 2002. 11% of the population consists of 19 recognized ethnic minorities. Officially, the Hungarian minority is the largest, with 1.4 million people, the second place being taken by the Roma minority, with 535.000 people.

As regard the estimates of the number of Roma by the Roma themselves as well as endorsed by various sociological and demographic researches and studies, the figures points to 1.5 - 2 million Roma, making Romania to have the most Roma inhabitants in Europe. These estimates are also largely recognized by the intergovernmental and international organizations.

Roma leaders claim that many Roma have not declared themselves as belonging to this minority, at the last census, due to various concerns including fearing from being discriminated against, unfavorable treatments, exclusion, attitudes and acts of intolerance by the majority.

***Roma are 'stinky gipsies' and 'born criminals'***

In the last 21 years since Romania has gone from communism to democracy, the subject "Roma / Gypsies / crows" sold many newspapers and made TV audience records.

On some issues, "Roma / Gypsies / crows" sold better than "sex", the unbeatable worldwide theme.

To the "success" of this subject have greatly contributed the Romanian authorities, from simple press offices of the institutions, to high-ranking representatives of the Romanian state as the President and ministers.

Romania is probably the only country, or among the very few ones in Europe where the press offices of some state institutions refers to the ethnicity of citizens. In the early '90s, the Police press offices stated in their press release that "a gypsy stole; ... a gypsy made a public scandal; ... a gypsy killed; etc". Although Romania has 19 minorities inhabiting, only criminals belonging to the Roma minority were specified in the press releases. This reinforced the idea

in the collective mentality according to which “in Romania only Gypsies steal”. After a series of protests by Roma NGOs, Romanian Police was forced to stop using the ethnicity of offenders in the press releases.

In May 2007, speaking with his wife about a dark-skinned journalist, the current President Traian Basescu used the expression "stinky gypsy", which was sanctioned by the National Council for Combating Discrimination - NCCD. In February 2010, in a meeting with the French Minister, Pierre Lelouch, the current Foreign Minister, Teodor Baconschi, said about Roma that they are "physiologically" criminals. Another Foreign Minister, Adrian Cioroianu, said in 2007, with obvious reference to the Roma “I was thinking if we could somehow buy a plot of Egyptian desert and place there those who embarrass us”.

Such statements have done nothing but provide extremist organizations and radical nationalist-oriented political parties in Romania with the ammunition they needed to proliferate anti-Roma racist statements in the media and the TV sites.

### ***The Mailat Case: Roma are thieves, criminals, murderers, criminals***

The most famous case of xenophobia in recent years, manifested in both press from Romania, as well as from Italy, is "the Mailat case". On October 31, 2007, the Romanian Mailat Romulus was apprehended by the Italian police and accused of killing an Italian woman, near a train station in Rome. Immediately after this incident the press from Italy has exploded, and the press from Romania followed its example.

According to the monitoring conducted between November 1<sup>st</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>, 2007, by the Media Monitoring Agency (AMP), in the case of Romulus Mailat, in 80% of the analyzed articles the Romanian journalists have not respected the principle of **presumption of innocence**. Merely, the Romanian journalists found Roma Mailat guilty of ‘damaging the image of Romania abroad’.

The study includes observations and comments that refer to situations where journalists have not respected the basic rules of journalism ethics - the presumption of innocence, the lack of association between crime and ethnicity, information that is not supported by data (e.g. unclear statistics, without citing sources), the use of manipulation techniques - the generalization to describe some particular cases, the omission of information, etc.

The monitoring conducted by AMP has followed the electronic editions of three central newspapers, of which, two quality (Jurnalul National and Evenimentul Zilei) and a tabloid (Libertatea). Under this monitoring, the most of the attributes associated with Roma in the analyzed articles made reference to undesirable behaviors (crime and violence).

#### **• ATTRIBUTES ASSOCIATED WITH ROMA ETHNIC GROUP:**

- thieves
- criminals
- killers
- murderers
- the outskirts of civilization
- mongrel

- beggars
- no culture
- violent

- **ACTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH ROMA ETHNIC GROUP:**

- homicide
- thefts
- rape
- living in camps
- physical aggression
- fights
- robbery
- living in the camp
- deprivation of liberty
- work
- trespassing
- committing crimes
- begging
- committed an act of extreme violence
- possession of weapons
- drug possession
- kidnapping
- living on and from the garbage
- outrage against morality
- pimping
- destruction
- public disturbance
- blackmail
- attacks
- commit horrors
- scandals
- lived in a shack
- live in poverty

**Romanian officials**

- living in camps
- rape
- live in ghettos
- not working
- do not pay taxes

The same attributes and actions were associated with the Roma minority by Italian journalists and police, also:

**Italian Journalists**

- consume alcohol
- living in the burrow
- rape
- robbery

- living in a miserable shack
- homicide
- live in poverty

### **Italian Police**

- usury
- buy luxury cars
- drug trafficking
- traffickers in human beings

Five days after the incident, new data in the investigation contradicted some of the stories made before by the journalists. The publication of the autopsy results, on Tuesday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, revealed that the victim was not raped, as the Italian and Romanian press related on the conviction.

*Libertatea* wrote that "after the autopsy, it wasn't discovered any sign to indicate that Romulus Mailat raped Giovanna, as the Italian press has written". Although the articles from *Evenimentul Zilei* have incriminated Mailat also for rape, the newspaper did not publish immediately the autopsy results which denied the thesis of rape.

### **The initiative of Silviu Prigoana Deputy to change by law the word "Roma" with "Gypsy".**

On September the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, ruling party Deputy Silviu Prigoana submitted to the Chamber of Deputies a bill that called for changing the word "Roma" with "tigan" (gypsy). Between November 2010 - April 2011, the draft law was in public debate in both chambers and even in government; the press in Romania covered on all sides this issue, which had record audiences.

In the above mentioned period, AMP made a media monitoring of three quality newspapers (Adevarul, Jurnalul National and Evenimentul Zilei), a tabloid (Libertatea) and a news site (Hotnews). In total, 73 articles and 1323 comments from readers were reviewed. In most of the analyzed articles, the journalists had a neutral attitude towards this subject, very few subjects having a negative attitude.

The exception was the daily central Jurnalul National, where from 15 articles analyzed, 12 had a negative attitude. I specify that this newspaper had a campaign in 2009 which urged the change of the word "Roma" with "gypsy". Evenimentul Zilei was the only newspaper in Romania, where from 20 articles analyzed, had two positive articles. This means that, overall, 93% of the analyzed articles were neutral and negative. The only positive publications for this legislative initiative were Jurnalul National (6 articles) and Libertatea (1 articles).

From the 3585 comments of readers, only 35 were positive regarding Roma, the rest being negative and neutral. According to monitoring, 71% of comments on the website of Jurnalul National newspaper were negative on Roma, 27% - neutral and only 2% positive.

53% of the comments of Libertatea tabloid readers have considered that the initiative of Deputy Prigoana was very good. In their opinions argumentation, these readers have taken account only of personal and political arguments. Very few have referred to social, historical, cultural and linguistic arguments.

In 25% of the negative comments, readers have had arguments on the status of Romania in the EU and on the alleged disadvantages of the image created by the Roma minority. Their argument was that the word "Roma" is confused by Europeans with "Roman" (Romanian) and that Europeans say that Romania is the home of Roma, and that's why the French and Italians call us "Gypsies". To solve this problem, AMP has identified 82 comments in which readers have suggested as solutions Roma extermination, deportation or their expulsion. Adevarul and Libertatea newspapers had 4 comments each, in which readers made reference to Marshal Ion Antonescu (who in 1942 decided to deport over 25,000 Roma from Romania to Transnistria) and even Adolph Hitler (8 comments).

### **Examples of racist comments:**

#### **ADEVARUL:**

- Maxx2011-01-20 22:15:52 Something must be done with these 2 million Roma in our country, we can not allow them to assimilate to our people, to pollute our veins with their blood, we must get rid of them all, to the last, until they don't swallow us or destroy our people! India and Bangladesh deportation, if they don't want extermination and that's it!

- anticiori 2011-01-21 01:06:44 If Antonescu was living, no crow would have been alive!!!! I can not wait for the official opening of hunting season for crows...may I'll have luck in this life, if not, in another.

#### **Libertatea:**

- opi 3.02.2011 | 10.03 : Gypsy or Roma, a devil anyway ... however they are called, they should still be gassed. Parasites must be exterminated by whatever means possible.

- retard 3.02.2011 | 10.52: Gypsies should be called as they are, meaning crows.

- antonescu 3.02.2011 | 12.54: They should be called as they are: GYPSIES; and if they could transferred anywhere but here, it would be even better! I would propose Bug, Siberia, India, Madagascar, etc.

- UN ROMAN 3.02.2011 | 17.49: It's a shame that Hitler and Antonescu didn't finish their project, the extermination of Gypsies.

- Mari 3.02.2011 | 18.07: Roma or Gypsies, still crows remain, talking about the same polluted race, so that Mr. Prigoana should propose other more serious laws and let this guys aside, they don't worth a damn anyway.

- ss 3.02.2011 | 19.49: Gypsies are a dirty, infected, thief, shaft and naughty nation on the planet, Gypsies are like bubonic plague or the last stage of cancer for Planet Earth.

- yo 9.02.2011 | 17.12: We regret that Ion Victor Antonescu could not finish cleaning the country.

## **AJRr activity and other Roma NGOs against racism in the media**

- *getting ban on press offices of state institutions specifying the ethnicity of criminals.* For many years, Roma NGOs have made many complaints to the leadership of the Romanian Police in which they asked to stop using the ethnicity of offenders in the press releases, which is considered irrelevant.

- *the implementation of the guide "How to objectively report on Roma and other minorities".* A group of mainstream professional journalists, among whom I count myself, managed to achieve through a program coordinated by the Center for Independent Journalism, a guide for Romanian journalists, how to report objectively about all minorities in Romania.

- *sanctioning the racist programs and statements, which have violated the rights of the Roma minority on TV, through the CNA and NCCD complaints.* Every time a journalist or a politician were making racist statements, Roma NGOs, including Roma Journalists Association, made complaints to the management of CNA and NCCD, which until now have been effective.

### **Problems encountered which have not been yet resolved:**

- *the absence of CNA for newspapers and internet sites makes harder sanctioning acts of racism in the media.* In Romania is still in debate the establishment of such institutions. AJRr support its establishment.

- *leaving "free" the racist comments on newspaper sites to increase traffic, incites to racial hatred.* By repeated claims towards NCCD, we try to make pressure on the managers of information sites to ban racist comments and messages of the readers.

- *lack of sanction by the representatives of the Romanian state by judges, encourages insults and racist statements against Roma (case presentation Basescu - stinky gypsy, which was sanctioned by the NCCD, but pulled away by the judges).* This is a problem of justice in Romania, which NGOs can not solve.