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Mr. Thorbjørn Jagland*

Report on conference

## THE ROMA BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

REFLECTIONS UPON GENOCIDE, RECOGNITION AND  
THE RESURGENCE OF EXTREMISM AND ANTI-GYPSYISM

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## Report on the Conference:

# THE ROMA BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

## REFLECTIONS UPON GENOCIDE, RECOGNITION AND THE RESURGENCE OF EXTREMISM AND ANTI-GYPSYISM

### **Introduction**

More than 65 people coming from all over Europe, from Finland to Romania, attended the conference. Mr. H. van Baar opened the conference. He presented the framework of the conference and introduced the guest speakers. The full texts of the delivered speeches are included below.

This conference has been organised in the framework of the European Requiem for Auschwitz project as part of the awareness raising component (See for further information on this project: [www.requiemforauschwitz.eu](http://www.requiemforauschwitz.eu) )

The conference is made possible thanks to (financial) support of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF), EU-Cultural Program, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, the Anne Frank House and the International Gypsy Festival.

Mr. J. Deboutte, the current chairman of the ITF, briefly addressed the conference by stressing the importance of the central issues of this conference. Establishing a better understanding of what happened to Roma and Sinti during the Nazi persecution will help people to develop deeper insight into the processes which continue to threaten the largest minority in modern Europe today. The ITF warmly supports this initiative.

### **Main questions to be addressed at this conference**

Huib van Baar

When, in September 2010, Euro-commissioner Viviane Reding made a reference to the Second World War regarding the expulsion of Bulgarian and Romanian EU citizens with a Romani background from France, numerous critics stood up to blame her for making what they considered an impossible comparison between the current situation and Nazi deportations.

Many critics put forward that, by making the comparison with the Second World War, she had made any fair debate impossible. Nevertheless, a minority of critics suggested that such a comparison could actually be made, when this is done carefully.

The central question of this conference is:

Is such a comparison possible at all?

Why and how could or should such a comparison be made, or not be made, to reflect upon the contemporary situation of Romani minorities and migrants in Europe?

Some of the key questions that we need to try to answer are the following:

First of all, what exactly do we compare when we suggest such a comparison?

Do we compare historical periods, do we compare certain countries or locations, do we compare certain attitudes and phenomena, do we compare socio-economic or political systems or circumstances, including forms of crisis, or do we, for instance, compare conditions of possibility for escalation? In other words, I think we need to clarify what the content and form of the comparison actually are.

Secondly, what is or should be the aim of such a comparison?

Some have proposed that a comparison could help to understand historical processes of inclusion and exclusion and can also help to focus on the difficult post-war process of achieving more adequate recognition and compensation for what happened during the Second World War.

This approach leads us also to discuss issues of prevention and of the distribution of knowledge about the past and present-day situation. Knowledge formation and dissemination are, of course, also related to the role that Holocaust education can or should play in the debate.

Thirdly, what are the key elements and social phenomena that could legitimize such a comparison between then and now?

We can list a number of general elements that play a central role in the comparison with what happened in the context of the War.

Without suggesting that my list covers all relevant phenomena, we can at least distinguish the five following, closely related and overlapping elements:

*First*, institutional racism

*Second*, the issue of segregation and ghettoization

*Third*, the issue of de-humanization

*Fourth*, the framing of the Roma as a public health, a public order, or a public security issue.

*And last but not least*, extreme forms of citizen or mob violence and racism.

I will briefly elaborate on each of these five phenomena.

*Institutional racism* can be connected with a number of measures that are taken on the basis of someone's ethnic background.

Here, I would like to mention initiatives such as ethnic profiling or registration, and the development or maintenance of special institutions, such as special school systems for Romani children in various Central and Eastern European countries.

But also measures such as the eviction of Roma from their houses, the expulsion of Roma from France, and the confiscation or even destruction of property of Roma by Italian authorities belong to this category.

Also the failure to materialize police or legal investigations in cases of racially motivated actions against Roma is to be considered as a form of institutional racism.

Institutional racism often relates to the second phenomenon that I have brought up, thus, to practices of *spatial segregation*.

A good example of such practices is the rapid increase, since the mid 1990s, of spatial segregation of Roma in the Czech Republic.

Today, about one third of all Roma in the Czech Republic live in separated or even totally segregated parts of villages and towns – partially due to various controversial measures of institutional racism.

Practices of ghettoization directly relate to the third element: practices of *de-humanization*.

These are practices that represent the Roma as less than human beings or practices that have led to living conditions that we can characterize as inhuman.

To start with the latter: These practices of de-humanization relate to the consequences of exclusion and segregation, thus to practices of sub-standard housing, sub-standard health care, and second-rate education.

These practices are directly connected with the radical impact of segregation on intra-ethnic and interethnic relations. Here I want to mention practices of exploitation, related to, for instance, labor and usury.

Of course, practices of de-humanization also relate to how, for instance, political parties or far-right groups represent the Roma. Let me give the example of a television commercial produced by the Hungarian far-right political party *Jobbik*. In 2010, *Jobbik* produced a television commercial as part of its election campaign. It portrays the Roma as a parasitical element of Hungarian society. At the end of the commercial, a uniformed member of *Jobbik* swats a fly on his hand.

The representation of the Roma as objects of abjection also relates to the *framing of the Roma as problems of public health, public order, and public or even national security*.

The suggestion that the Roma could be dirty or parasitical elements has often been connected with the idea that they could be inadaptable, criminal, a-social and backward.

These socially circulating images are often interacting with the idea that the Roma would represent a threat to public health, order or security.

The public order framing has been central to, for instance, the justification of the expulsion of Romani migrants by French authorities. But these framings have also been central to legitimizing the removal of musicians or the sellers of street papers from various towns throughout Europe, including Belgium and the Netherlands.

Last but not least, the framing of the Roma as a danger to public order or security cannot be seen in isolation from extreme forms of *citizen violence and racism against the Roma*.

One of the immediate reasons for this conference is that Romani minorities throughout Europe have been faced with the alarming resurgence of extremism, nationalism and anti-Gypsyism.

In countries as diverse as Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic, Romani citizens have been attacked by their fellow citizens, causing casualties and increased social tensions.

## **The Process of Exclusion and Persecution of Roma and Sinti in the 1930s and 1940s**

Gerhard Baumgartner

The fate of the European Roma during the Holocaust, the murder of several hundreds of thousands of Roma and Sinti in the territories under control of the Third Reich, - a genocide which is referred to as „Porrajimos" or „Samusdripen" by different Roma and Sinti representatives- today forms an accepted part of our European historical discourse about the 20th century and has become a focal point of a new European-wide process of Roma identity formation. In its monstrosity and unprecedented brutality it looks like a vast shadow cast upon the common history of Roma and Gadge alike, as a memento of an unspeakably dehumanized past.

Historians have reconstructed the events which finally culminated in these murderous acts in great detail, mapping the increasingly radical acts of marginalisation and persecution of people labelled as

„Zigeuner“ – i.e. as „Gypsies“ by the authorities. In the course of the next half hour I will attempt to take you - step by step - down that road right to its fatal end. I will not present many new findings or repeat all the old and well known facts. I rather want to try to present an analysis of the major ingredients of the catastrophe, ingredients which will appear strangely familiar, because we can easily encounter them in Europe today. And we will see, that many of the so called „policy measures“ employed in current dealings with the Roma especially in Eastern Europe are not that new after all and have reared their ugly heads already in the interwar period.

## Romanticism

The beginning of the road is actually quite idyllic and takes us a bit further back in time – into the Romantic period, when the so called „Gypsies“ were becoming fashionable, when they became idealised in various ways. During the Romantic period the so called „Gypsies“ were cast in the role of the last children of nature, relicts of an idyllic past, unimpaired and unspoilt by the many restraints of bourgeois society, living a carefree, temperamental life of simple wants and simple pleasures. The painting by Ferencz Pongracz from the 1830s illustrates this idealised view of the „Gypsy“ which the poet Nikolaus Lenau has translated into well known verses:

### The Three Gypsies

Once I chanced upon gypsies three  
resting in sunny weather,  
as my jalopy carried me  
wary through gravelly heather.

Just for himself one gypsy had  
gotten hold of his fiddle,  
played, surrounded by evening's red,  
fiery songs for a diddle.

Had the other a pipe in his mouth,  
looked at the spiralling matter -  
happy, as if from the whole of this earth  
nothing could suit him better.

And the third one in comfort slept,  
his guitar in a tree bend;  
over the strings the breezes crept,  
over his heart a dream went.

On their clothing carried the three  
holes with patches around them,  
but they defied intrepidly  
what in their destiny bound them.  
Threefold the gypsies revealed that day,  
how, when one's life is benighted,

to sing it, to smoke it, to dream it away -  
and thrice to detest and deride it.

Romanticism has taught us fellow Europeans, that the Roma are fundamentally different from us, that they never will be like the rest of us. For many decades of the 19th century this prejudice conveyed mostly positive connotations, but not for long.

## Photography

That this romantic image should prove so powerful and lastingly effective, is due to the appearance of a new, modern medium, photography, which at the same time, in the second half of the 19th century, swept across Europe. Photography played a crucial role in the history of the Roma and Sinti. The first photographs, called „carte de visite“ photos, because they were as small as a visiting-card, sold in the thousands, the bestsellers were royal heads like Empress Sissy and Franz Joseph, famous murderers and – so called „Gypsies“. Photographers from Transylvania depicted the so called „last savages of Europe“ and sold their images in tens of thousands of copies all over the continent. The photos were arranged in their studios and the photographers often supplied all the clothes and props.

The „Gypsies“ mostly captured in these photographs represented actually a very small and special segment of the European Roma population, namely groups of wandering Roma of Moldavian, Transylvanian and Romanian origin which around the middle of the 19th century started to appear in larger numbers in different European countries; a minority even then, but a picturesque minority. As we shall see, it was not for the last time, that the Roma of Central Europe should play a crucial role in determining the European perception of the Roma in general.

I think this is a very important point to remember, because the number of Roma and Sinti actually living in these countries was very small. In 1893 a first official census established about 275.000 Roma and Sinti in Hungary. -And Hungary at that time included all of Croatia, northern Serbia, Transylvania, all of Slovakia and the Transcarpathion region of what is nowadays the Ukraine. These 270.000 amounted to little more than 1,2 percent of the total population of this vast area - and 90 per cent of them were already settled, only 9.00 were classified as „ kóbor cigányok“, i.e. as „truly wandering Gypsies“.

But by the turn of the century literature and operettas, supported by photographs and paintings had firmly embedded an image of the „Gypsy“ in the mind of the average European, resembling something like this Czech postcard. Public perception centring on a small group of Roma of Eastern European origin, had very little to do with the everyday circumstances of the majority of the European Roma and Sinti.

In Western Europe most of the travelling „Sinti“- families, like many other migrant segments of society, e.g. the „Jenische“ in Souther Germany, Austria and Switzerland, the „Resande“ in Scandinavia or the Tinkers and Travellers of the British Isles or the Dutch „Woonwagenbewoners“ - did usually only travel during the summer season, following established seasonal routes from country fair to country fair and market days and festivals. And they were not necessarily that poor either. Many other Western European Sinti families had settled into middle class ways of life and bourgeois occupations, many of them were running cinemas for example, and of course there were the professional musicians.

The majority of the Eastern European Roma were actually very poor agricultural workers, who lived in houses built on common land, working as seasonal workers, herdsmen, harvesters, brick makers, supplementing their income as knife- and scissor grinders, broom- and basket weavers, etc. The apparently „wild“, roaming bands of Transylvanian and Romanian Roma, often painted, photographed and filmed, were an absolute minority even before World War I..

But this stereotypical perception of the „Gypsies“ firmly logged in the consciousness of the European population, in the „collective memory“ if you want, was one of the fundamental reasons, why so many experts, administrators and institutions should in the first half of the 20th century dedicate so much time and effort to such a small group.

Even the Nazis counted only 18.000 so called „Gypsies“ in Germany before the World War II., that was 0,02 per cent of the population and even after the annexation of Austria and Bohemia there were never more than a maximum of 50.000 Roma and Sinti living in the Third Reich, a negligible 0,05 per cent. But due to this stereotype the Roma and Sinti people were perceived as fundamentally different, and by the 1930s they were also perceived as fundamentally dangerous and bad, as a threat to society.

#### Registration

The perception had changed towards the end of the 19th century. During the last third of the 19th century the liberal regimes of the European states which had enabled a free movement of people over most of the continent was radically altered. Military draft, police regulations, trade restrictions and stricter rules for residence and work permits led to the introduction of special permits and passports. All kinds of migrants now became registered.

The first „identity cards“ in the modern sense of the word, i.e. an identity cards with a photograph and with fingerprints, were issued nearly exactly 100 years ago, in 1912 in France, registering all migrants, „gens de voyage“ in French, who were obliged to carry their „carnet anthropometrique“ all the time. Apart for a firmly embedded stereotype about „Gypsies“, systematic registration became the second decisive element in the early marginalisation of the European Roma and Sinti. In the decades after the World War I this tendency to register all migrants swept across Europe and was soon extended to all so called „Gypsies“, even the settled ones. Special passports and special registers were introduced in Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, etc. One of the reasons why the so called „Zigeunerfrage“, i.e. the „Gypsy Question“ now became a „European Problem“ is closely connected with the development of international police cooperation. The IKPK, the „Internationale Kriminalpolizeiliche Kommission“, the precursor of nowadays „INTERPOL“ was established in 1923 in Vienna by the former President of The Vienna Police and Federal Chancellor, Johann Schober.

The registration process of all so called „Gypsies“ had been started by the „Nachrichtendienst für die Sicherheitspolizei in Bezug auf Zigeuner“ in 1899 in Munich, but INTERPOL played an important role in extending its practice all over Europe. The Austrian police had a long tradition of registering and especially of photographing all suspicious elements of society, reaching far back into the last third of the 19th century. Summing up, we can say, that everybody who became registered as a „Gypsy“ during the Interwar Years by the police or by local administrators later ended up on a deportation train towards a Nazi concentration camp.

#### The Roma of Central Europe

The majority of the European Roma has always lived in Central and Eastern Europe. And the eastern half of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy always had had a very much higher percentage of Roma population. Austria had after 1921 acquired a region of former Hungary – the so called Burgenland – with a Roma population of three percent. The situation in the province of Burgenland – which exhibited many of the typical structural features of Eastern European societies – should essentially influence the general discourse about the „Zigeunerfrage“, i.e. the „Gypsy Question“ first in Austria, and after 1938 also in the Third Reich. As we shall see, the social situation of a small group of Eastern European Roma and Sinti was again to influence first the European and soon the National-Socialist discourse on the Roma and Sinti.

The Burgenland Roma, 9.000 persons living in 120 settlements between 30 to 300 persons, constituted 3 percent of the region’s population, in the district of Oberwart even amounting to 10 percent. They are an exceptionally well documented group, with photographs illustrating their houses as well as their traditional occupations.

These photographs from the Regional Archives of Burgenland were all taken by the police during the 1920s and early 1930s during so called police-razzias. This is also the reason why all the inhabitants are standing in front of their houses in this funny way. The police wanted to be able to identify all the inhabitants of a house. The photographs were not taken in order to illustrate life in the Roma settlements, but in order to illustrate the difficulties of police work. And they were later published in professional journals of the criminal police. Here the early practice of the Habsburg police force of photographing all suspect elements of society merged with the new INTERPOL trend to register all Gypsies, coupled with the introduction of newest anthropometric methodologies of policing, like for example fingerprinting. Registering and policing the Roma and Sinti was a highly attractive and highly promising form of police work. The international work context and the experience in the application of the newest methodologies made it a highly covetable stepping stone for careers within the criminal police.

#### Eugenics

Another crucial element for the marginalisation and persecution of the Roma and Sinti was the general acceptance of Eugenic theories within the academic world, especially among the medical professions, the natural sciences but also the social sciences. The basic tenant of Eugenics - i.e. the theory that social behaviour is to a rather large extent hereditary - had very far reaching consequences for criminal law administrations, because especially „criminal and asocial behavior“ were regarded as hereditary defects and thus incurable – and of course self perpetuating. If you were, what then was termed „a born criminal“, you could of course fight your inborn urge to commit crimes, and in very unlikely cases you might even succeed, but the chances were rather, that sooner or later you would fall victim to your hereditary traits and commit a crime. Eugenic theories reigned supreme in all „developed“ countries of the Western World and many of the Eastern Block as well, with forced abortions for women who had been labelled „asocial“ right up to the beginning of the end of the 1960s in Sweden and Czechoslovakia for example.

#### The World Economic Crisis

A further crucial contributing factor for the marginalisation and increasing persecution of the European Roma and Sinti was the economic crisis of the interwar years, first the economic crisis during and right after the end of World War I and then the so called World Economic Crisis of the late 1920s and 1930s.

The years after World War I had marginalised many itinerant craftsmen, the increasing disappearance of the horse affected the traditional horse dealing families among the Western European Sinti and inflation ruined many small businesses and enterprises.

But it was the Eastern European Roma which were hit the hardest. Living at the fringes of farming villages, they had managed to scrape a living as seasonal harvest workers during summer and by supplementing their income with traditional crafts or as occasional musicians during the winter. Mass unemployment, caused by the World Economic Crisis brought sheer disaster to the Roma settlements. In Eastern Europe the unemployed returned in large numbers from the industrial cities into their villages of origin and pushed the local Roma right out of the labour market. Their living conditions deteriorated in an unprecedented way. In some of the Roma settlements child mortality rose to incredible 70 percent. I have to add, that child mortality in Central Europe was generally around 17 to 18 percent before World War II. A very large figure compared to some 3 to 4 out of 1000 in Europe today, when about 4 out of 1000 children die before their second birthday. In the Roma settlements of Burgenland up to 70 out of 100 children died before their second birthday. The Roma were simply dying from hunger.

But why were the Roma so much worse off than the rest of the rural population, and why was the situation so much worse in Central Europe? The reason for this is a structural one. The settled Roma of Central Europe usually had no land whatsoever. They had either been settled by the aristocracy on their domains, where they could build houses and work on the estates – mostly for food. Or they had been settled at the fringes of existing villages on common land. In contrast to the majority of the rural population, who had some small patches of land available for subsistence farming, the Roma had no land whatsoever. Half an acre of land, 0,2 hectare, is usually enough to feed a family and to fatten a pig. The Roma of Central Europe had to buy every single potato and every stick of wood for heating in the winter; or they had to work for it, or they had to steal food and firewood in the surrounding fields and forests. Conflicts between Roma and Gadje framers were rapidly increasing in the villages during the 1930ies.

But why did nothing like this happen in Western Europe. The answer to this riddle lies in one of the big structural differences between Eastern and Western Europe. Western and Eastern European societies have different heritage systems. In Western Europe one child, usually the first born son, inherits the farm while all the other children are paid off with minimal sums and have to leave – swelling the ever increasing workforce of the industrial cities. In Eastern Europe all children usually inherit equal shares of the farm. This led to a very quick splintering up of farm land into minimal plots in the second half of the 19th century. But with the advent of industrialisation the pattern changed. Now one child would stay at home and work the farm, while the others migrated to the cities or overseas in order to make money. But they were still part-owners of the farm which sooner or later had to be paid off. When during the World Economic Crisis the masses of unemployed workers lost their jobs and soon their meagre unemployment benefits – they returned to their home villages, where they were still co-owners of the old family farm. In the absence of any alternative they started to work on the family farm, pushing the seasonal workers, i.e. the Roma, completely out of the local job market. The Austrian province of Burgenland, which had been part of the kingdom of Hungary for roughly 1.000 years, kept its Eastern European heritage system also after 1921. This resulted in a complete catastrophe for the local Roma communities.

What made the situation even worse, was that there was no, or only totally insufficient systems of social welfare available. All poor relief or welfare, health services and schooling was organised and funded by the local communities. And very often a farming village of some 300 persons was confronted with a Roma settlement of 100,200 or 300 persons, who were completely destitute and draining the financial funds of the village.

In 1933, a first conference was organised in the village of Oberwart, the local centre of a district where the Roma constituted 10 percent of the population. On a photograph we can see the members of the conference inspecting the Roma settlement of Oberwart. The conference was organised and attended by the majors of towns and villages with larger Roma populations and by representatives of all political parties, from the Christian Socialists to the Social Democrats. The ideas for the solution of the so called „Zigeunerfrage“, the „Gypsy Question“ varied from resettling the Roma in reservations like the American Indians, from deporting them to an island in the pacific ocean, i.e. Madagascar, locking them up in workhouses or forced labour camps. And one of the participants started his contribution with the words „Since we cannot kill them...“Even if formulated in the negative, the idea was already floating around in the heads of some of the participants.

The small group of settled Central European Roma from Burgenland slowly turned into the focal point of the discourse about Roma and Sinti in Austria.

#### National Socialist Radicalisation

The illegal National Socialists of the region turned the so called „Gypsy Question“ into the central topic of their campaign, altering their otherwise anti-Semitic slogan into an anti-Gypsy one.

„Das Burgenland zigeunerfrei!“ / „Burgenland free of Gypsies!“

And it was the regional leader of the local underground Nazi party, Dr. Tobias Portschy, who himself came from a farming family in a small village in the district of Oberwart, who published the first programmatic memorandum for the persecution of Roma and Sinti, arguing from a radically racist perspective. „Die Zigeunerfrage“ / „The Gypsy Question“ with the accompanying motto:

„Willst du, Deutscher, Totengräber des nordischen Blutes im Burgenland werden, übersehe nur die Gefahr, die ihm die Zigeuner sind!“

(„If you, German, want to become the gravedigger of all Nordic blood in Burgenland, you only have to neglect the danger, that the Gypsies are posing for it!“)

Together with the first so called results of Robert Ritter’s „Research Centre for Racial Hygiene“ the memorandum played a central part in determining Nazi policy towards the so called „Gypsies“. Published in August 1938 it was followed in December 1938 by Heinrich Himmler’s „Grunderlass betr. Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens“ , („ Principal Decree Concerning the Fight Against the Gypsy Plague“), where he ordered the „Gypsy Question“ to be solved „aus dem Wesen der Rasse!“ („according to racial principals“).

The direct persecution Roma and Sinti and their imprisonment into labour- and concentration camps had before 1937 been rather haphazard, and several institutions were competing each other: social services, the criminal police and the Gestapo. But large scale arrests and deportations had not yet happened. It was with the annexation of Austria in 1938 that a kind of radicalisation of the policy toward the so called „Gypsies“ became discernible! According to new research findings Portschy’s

memorandum from the summer of 1938 seems to have been at least co-authored by Bernhard Wilhelm Neureiter, a lawyer in the employ of the regional government of the province of Lower Austria, who for years had been collecting material and „studying“ the so called „Gypsy Question“. The memorandum of 1938 called for the exclusion of all Roma children from schooling, the deportation into labour camps and for a radical policy of racial segregation in all sectors of society including the army. All its demands were to be put rigidly into practice within the Third Reich during the next few years. Concepts drawn up before the background of the very special situation in Burgenland became of crucial importance for the development of Nazi policy towards all European Roma and Sinti.

The Nazis added two new elements to the persecution of the European Roma and Sinti. The first one: a clearly racist answer to a very complex social situation, by claiming that the so called „Gypsies“ were a fundamentally parasitic people, unable to create and condemned to exploit their hosting peoples. The second element was the principle of „Vorbeugende Verbrechensbekämpfung“, i.e. „Crime Prevention“. The term was invented by the Nazis and is a logical derivative of the Eugenic belief, that deviant social behaviour is inherited. If you are convinced, that someone is sooner or later going to commit a crime – because he is condemned to do so, because it is in his genes – than it actually makes sense to lock the person away before he does commit the crime. Why wait till it happens? This was the rationale behind deporting all the so called „Gypsies“, men, women and children into labour- and concentration camps.

Not even the idea of locking so called „Gypsies“ into camps came from the Nazis originally: Roma and Sinti families had been locked into camps during the World War I. for example by the French military authorities between 1915 and 1919, when French Roma and Sinti were held in an improvised camp in a capuchin monastery in Crest. Camps for „Gypsies and Beggars“, so called „Bettler- und Zigeunerlager“ had existed in the Interwar period in Bavaria, in Switzerland and Austria.

One of the most revealing features of the so called „Zigeunerlager“ of the Third Reich was the fact, that they were actually not established by the Gestapo, the SS, the SA or the Criminal Police, but rather by communal and regional public administration authorities. The first Zigeunerlager was established in 1935 in the city of Cologne, i.e. Köln and the local Roma and Sinti families had to move from their flats, houses and sometimes with their wagons into the new camp at the outskirts of the city. When Berlin hosted the Olympic Games in 1936, the same fate befell the Sinti and Roma families of Berlin, who had to move to the newly established „Gypsy Camp Marzahn“.

A common feature of all these forced resettlements was, that they were not justified by any concrete laws, in most cases there was no legal basis for them whatsoever. The same is true for many of the first deportations into labour camps in 1938. The major problem for the Roma and Sinti was, that the fascist state had withdrawn its protecting hand from its „Gypsy“ citizens and that there was no legal authority left to which they could turn for help and legal protection. The Roma and Sinti found themselves completely at the mercy of local majors, communal and regional institutions, bureaucrats, police officers and party thugs, who often turned out to be one and the same.

#### The fatal spiral of rising social welfare costs

The dynamic which finally was to culminate in the genocide of the Roma and Sinti, was set into motion by the mass arrests and mass deportations of 1938 and 1939. Two classical institutions of Roma administration and persecution, the police authorities and the welfare institutions, cooperatively

created those practical constraints, which step by step led to mass murder and finally organised genocide.

I will illustrate this with a concrete example. After the annexation of Austria in 1938 the National Socialists had deported many Roma and Sinti into work camps all over Austria. In 1939 the „Reichskriminalpolizeiamt“ in Berlin, the „National Office of the Criminal Police“ – remembering the Austrian complaints of Tobias Portschy and Bernhard Wilhelm Neureiter about thousands of unemployed Austrian Roma and Sinti – ordered the deportation of 3.000 able bodied men and women into the concentration camps of Dachau, Buchenwald and Ravensbrück. These deportations set in motion a spiral of rising social welfare costs, which in the end should prove fatal for its helpless victims.

After the annexation of Austria in 1938 the German war industry had quickly sucked dry the labour market, the unemployed had disappeared back into the cities and the Roma all had found work as well. The local head of the provincial government, the Styrian Gauleiter Siegfried Uiberreither himself commented on the nonsensical nature of the deportations.

„Although these are correctly employed Gypsies, who are neither unwilling to work, nor have previous criminal offences and in no way constitute a burden to the general public, I will order their internment into forced labour camps out of the consideration, that a Gypsy – as somebody who stands outside the „Volksgemeinschaft“ (the people’s community) – is ever asocial!“

And a year later he reported the disastrous and counter-productive results of the deportation policy: „Because of the recent deportation into work camps of all male Gypsies who are able to work, the number of Gypsy family members, who need social assistance has risen dramatically. Since through this action nearly all Gypsy families have been robbed of their breadwinner around 2000 Gypsies ( grown-ups, women and children) have become dependent on social aid. The deportation has actually achieved the exact opposite of its original intention.“

The villages had demanded the deportations of the unemployed Roma, but when the deportations came, the Roma were no longer unemployed. But since all able bodied men and women were deported and only children and the old remained in the Roma settlements, the cost of social welfare the local councils had to shoulder grew even larger. So the villages asked for more deportations, which left even more children and elderly at the mercy of the local councils. The louder they demanded deportations, the more Roma were deported, but the more the local councils had to pay for the family members left behind.

In 1940 this finally led to the establishment of the largest so called Gypsy Camp of the Third Reich in Lackenbach in Burgenland with about 4.000 prisoners, which was planned and financed by the social welfare organisations of the regional and district governments of Lower Austria and Vienna. The criminal police supplied the prison guards. And the ever rising welfare costs for the abandoned children and elderly finally led to the decision to deport 5.000 Austrian Roma and Sinto to a special Gypsy Camp within the Jewish Ghetto in Litzmannstadt, in nowadays Lodz in Poland.

Among the 5007 deported in 5 trains in November 1941 - 11 were dead on arrival. 60 percent of the deported were children under the age of 12. They were crammed into 5 old buildings at the fringes of the Jewish Ghetto, about 40 persons per room. The incredible sanitary situation and severe malnutrition resulted in an outbreak of typhoid fever which within six weeks killed 630 persons. When the Nazi warden of the camp also died of typhoid fever, the city bureaucrats panicked and ordered the mass murder of all remaining inmates. In January 1942 they were deported to the Chelmno extermination

camps, where they were gassed and shot and buried in mass graves. Not a single person survived. The deportation to Lodz had not been planned, organised or financed by the SS, or central party officials, but by the regional and district administrations and the social services 'administrations of Styria, Lower Austria and Vienna.

Subsequent mass deportations of Roma and Sinti from all over the German Reich and German Occupied Territories, especially the deportations to Auschwitz in 1943, as well as mass shootings by German units - which went on right until the last days of the war - resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of Roma and Sinti. out of the 22.600 prisoners of the Gypsy Camp at Auschwitz only about 2.400 survived. The victims among the Roma number several hundreds of thousands, since research into the topic has only begun 35 years after the end of World War II., many things remain to be researched, uncovered and documented. But the losses were colossal. In the region of Burgenland 90 percent of the original Roma population was killed, with one or two exceptions and all the 120 Roma settlements were destroyed.

#### Helpers and Bystanders

Could this fate have been prevented? Was there a time, a point, when this deadly development still would have been reversible? Let me answer this with two examples from two villages in Burgenland.

The aristocrat Count Géza de Rohonczy, a wealthy landowner in the vicinity of Lackenbach demanded whole Roma families as forced labourers for his big estate. Some of them he let escape across the nearby Hungarian border, others he housed together with their children on his farms and refused to hand them over for deportation. All the surviving Roma claimed after the war that he had saved all their lives, fully aware of what he was doing or risking. No police or any other Nazi institution ever questioned him or threatened him with any kind of retribution.

In the village of Kleinpetersdorf two Roma families lived side by side. The one was the village blacksmith; the other was his brother in law, an agricultural labourer. When in 1943 the police came to deport them to Auschwitz, the local major intervened on behalf of the blacksmith and his family, claiming that the village would not be able to exist without him. The blacksmith and his family were never troubled again till the end of the war, the whole family of his brother in law perished in Auschwitz. This is only a further example of a well known fact: deportations can only be carried out with the support or clandestine approval of the local population, never against it.

#### Parallels

This last remark brings us right back into the present. None of the atrocities of the last years which we have heard about from Roma settlements in Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria and other Central and Eastern European countries would have been possible without the clandestine approval of most of the bystanders. And many more atrocities have been prevented only by the brave intervention of courageous friends supporters and activists.

In many countries of Central and Eastern Europe I perceive numerous parallels to the situation of the Interwar Years. All the ingredients for a new disaster that we have met with in the 1930s and 1940s like the open or clandestine registration of members of the Roma population, a severe economic crisis, the largely inefficient systems of social welfare, rising social conflicts and a tide of right wing and racist organisations and movements, they all seem to be present again.

I would rather like to end my presentation by drawing attention to some current tendencies, which I think do not get the attention they deserve.

The first one is the tendency to discuss the situation of all European Roma and Sinti by the light of the current developments in the Central European countries. Like several times before the situation of a certain group of Central European Roma dominates the European discourse about the European Roma and Sinti. But their situation is nowhere identical in any of the countries of Europe and a lot might be gained by refraining from unfounded generalisations and by reverting to more detailed, national analyses. It is my firm conviction, that the Roma and Sinti are equal subjects of their representative states and as such their security and welfare is first and foremost the responsibility of these states.

I fear that an over-emphasis on the Roma and Sinti as a European minority might also contribute to the already extensive withdrawal of state support for many Roma communities in the region. Again the state seems to withdraw its protecting hands from its Roma citizens and to deliver them unprotected into the hands of all kinds of local and regional institutions, party organisations, neighbourhood guards or nationalist paramilitary formations. Many local school boards openly segregate their children into Roma and non-Roma pupils or refuse to school them at all.

Their governments also often deliver their Roma subjects into the hands of new neo-liberal players like international employment schemes and so called „activation“ programs, often devised and administered by international institutions or institutions of the European Community, programs which practically amount to little more than modern form of compulsory public labour for virtually minimal subsidies. Some of the people employed in these „public work schemes“ are already rented out to local enterprises, where they now do the same job for less money than they were paid before they had been made redundant. For some time now there has been talk of employing these „public workers“ on big construction sites for motorways and such, which of course would mean that one would have to house them in special camps, which could be guarded by the many police officers which some of the Central European states had to call back from early retirement.

Modern camps for Roma and Sinti would be no novelty in nowadays Europe, camps surrounded by walls and fences, often closed for the night. Italy has had its *camì nomadi* for some time; the Ukrainian city of Uzhorod has just created a new one with a fence around it.

Many of these monstrosities are being paid for or are at least partly subsidized by European community grants and programs, which are being drawn up for the so called „largest European minority“. The Roma and Sinti minority seems to be the by far fastest growing minority in the world, growing from some four to five million to between 12 to 14 million in only a decade. But interestingly enough hardly any hard data exist about the Roma and Sinti minority. We rather seem to be stuck in a kind of strange situation where all the participating players seem to be interested in constantly driving up their numbers. The Roma institutions because they might gain more political clout as spokespersons of large segments of society, NGO's because they might become more important, their national governments because they might profit by gaining higher subsidies for their policies from European Structural Funds. It seems like a win-win situation all around. Only the Roma might lose out in the end, because they risk to be turned into a kind of enormously inflated social bogey-man, with whom politicians can frighten Western and Eastern European voters before elections.

But the greatest danger of all seems to me the withdrawal of the state from some of its traditional functions: as a provider of basic public services like education, as a guarantor of equal rights, civil

liberties and protection of its citizens and as a firm controller of the monopoly on violence. Too often Central European states withdraw these elementary forms of protection, making room for all sorts of more „private“ or so called „civil“ forms of violence.

I think most all of society, but especially the Roma would actually profit from the disappearance of some of these new, so called neo-liberal instruments of public administration and most of them would happily revert to the old structures of a traditional „liberal“ form of government, with its clear checks and balances, its monopoly on power and with the equal protection of all its citizens under the law.

**Zoni\_Weisz** interviewed by Dieuwertje Blok

My parents, sister, and brother were arrested along with all other Sinti and Roma that the Nazis managed to find on 16 May 1944. I was staying that night with an aunt. When we heard about this razzia, we immediately went into hiding, but later we were discovered and brought to Westerbork. That was on 19 May 1944. The 'gypsy transport' had already left so they couldn't put us on the train on time. So they decided to bring us to the train station in Assen. That's when I saw my parents, sister, and brother for the last time, in cattle cars. I managed to escape because a 'good' policeman, when seeing that I wanted to join them, pulled me back and said: "Get lost". We were in hiding during the rest of the war.

(More information on Zoni Weisz: see digital exhibition [www.romasinti.eu](http://www.romasinti.eu) )

### **Anti-Gypsyism and Romaphobia in contemporary European societies**

Jarmila Balážová

My name is Jarmila Balážová and I am a professional journalist. I studied journalism at Charles University in Prague and I work both in the majority-society media and in the Romani media. My experiences from my parallel work on both sides of the tracks have made it possible for me to understand the need for Romani press, radio and television broadcasting. What's more, through my work in the majority-society media, I have become convinced of the existence of stereotypes to which the reporting on Romani issues done by the mainstream media must conform. I have witnessed this process with my own eyes.

Naturally, my colleagues and I at the non-profit organization Romea are doing our best to break down these stereotypes by focusing on the media and on collaboration with non-Romani journalists. Sometimes we are successful, and sometimes we run into the persistent grudge that our society holds against Romani people, which has recently been intensifying once more. This anti-Gypsyism has been appearing more and more frequently, along with racism in official publications as well.

We are all currently witnessing how Europe, several decades after the end of the Second World War and the horrors of the Holocaust, is allowing the return of hatred against the Romani national minority. Because Romani people are economically, educationally and socially disadvantaged in various countries, post-totalitarian ones in particular, they are not allowed genuine participation at the political level and therefore have no effective defence against either latent racism or racism expressed through physical violence.

The media, as we all know, play an immeasurably fundamental role in the creation of public opinion about minorities, the Romani minority included. Sometimes this role is positive, and sometimes – unfortunately, more often - it is negative.

I will focus my presentation on several examples and observations that represent the situation in the Czech Republic in particular. However, these examples are comparable to those of many other countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

The changes that accompanied the advent of democracy after 1989 unfortunately caught most of Czech society, including the Romani community, unprepared. In particular, we were unprepared for an increasing number of neo-Nazi and racist demonstrations and for the groups and individuals who choose to profile themselves that way politically.

The 1990s began in the Czech Republic on a rising tide of anti-Romani sentiment and tension. This took the form of drastic pogroms against places where Romani people live in greater numbers. The neo-Nazis have that violence on their conscience, as they do the more than 20 racially motivated murders that have been committed in my country.

Today the Romani minority is not represented in Parliament. Romani people are managing to defend themselves in a limited way only, and are currently being moved more and more onto the fringes of society economically.

At the start of this century, there was a further transformation in the sentiments against this minority. The Czech Republic, which unlike other countries has never had any historical experience with ghettos, has now allowed them to be created. The number of socially excluded localities is growing at a chilling rate and one-third of the entire Romani population lives in them today. These ghettos are accompanied by a high rate of socio-pathological phenomena such as crime and drug use. The majority society is also calling Romani people "parasites" for accessing welfare.

The so-called "Romani topics" have been artfully reshaped during the last five to eight years into a policy against "inadaptables" which is being taken up not only by neo-Nazi parties, but also by "serious" politicians coming into both chambers of the Czech Parliament from regions that have long underestimated the importance of addressing these phenomena. These politicians are behind this continually intensifying "anti-Gypsyism", which has suddenly found a more logical excuse for itself. This is no longer just about neo-Nazism or racism; instead, it is about the need to discuss these matters openly. Politicians score political points and support when they voice an openly anti-Romani, hateful ideology.

Anti-Romani sentiment in Europe, particularly after the economic collapse in these post-communist European countries, is very dangerous. This sentiment has been passed from the neo-Nazis to politicians who are cleverer at manipulating public opinion. In 2011, mobs of "decent citizens" with sticks in their hands marched through some towns in the Šluknov district, trying to reach buildings where the "inadaptables" live. Such events are a warning to us. Kristallnacht can repeat itself, as can the terminology of those days (which has just undergone slight permutations) for the non-Aryan, the unfit, the genetically impure, and the inadaptable.

A special role has been played recently in the Czech Republic by certain media outlets, in particular online ones, as well as by privately owned television stations. Excesses have been committed by public broadcast television as well. Public radio broadcasting has essentially behaved the most professionally recently. Let me give you several examples:

In the Czech Republic there is an online media outlet called *Parlamentní listy*, which means Parliamentary News. Despite its name, it has nothing to do with Parliament. For the last year and a half, it has literally been conducting a media witch-hunt against Romani people. The editors give space to people with documented links to right-wing extremism and publish vituperative articles about Romani people that are completely fabricated. These false reports are then reprinted by mainstream media outlets without any attempt to verify the information. Our civic association, *Romea*, is a thorn in the side of these hacks, as we have revealed several of their articles to have been lies. Not only did *Parlamentní listy* have to publish an apology, but the other mainstream media outlets had to as well. For example, one false report described the Romani treasurer of a party that does not exist in the Czech Republic, the European Romani Party, running off with this non-existent party's non-existent money. All of it, naturally, was pure invention, and we revealed that after just one week of research.

Another example concerns the privately-owned television station *Nova*. Most recently, for example, *Nova* broadcast the testimony of a girl who claimed she had been attacked and raped by a small group of Romani men. This report prompted yet another wave of negative reactions to this minority. Two days later, police determined the girl had invented the entire incident. The television station never apologized.

My final example comes from the public broadcaster, *Czech Television*. *Petr Uhl*, the former Czech Human Rights Commissioner, and *Anna Šabatová*, the former deputy ombudsman, sent a complaint to the public broadcaster over the fact that the term "inadaptable" was being frequently used in the reporting of this public broadcasting television station to evoke a connection to Romani people and to create an anti-Romani atmosphere. A lawyer for *Czech Television* responded to their complaint by giving a shocking explanation. Not only did he harshly reject the complaint per se, he defended himself with these words: "Several Gypsies work in our television station, one of them even anchors the news."

My aim in giving you these examples has been to give you the hint that the media deserve greater scrutiny from us all. We need a bigger strategy on how to collaborate with them. There is no doubt that there is a need for media analysis, for work on the creation of public opinion, and for greater objectivity regarding the position of Romani people not just throughout Europe, but throughout the world.

### **"Voices of the past heard today, memories of the future"**

Michelle M. van Burik

As a descendant of families who suffered the consequences of the Second World War, I am grateful to be here today to give my presentation. First let me introduce you to the history how social exclusion of Roma started, as it is the beginning of segregation. It already started in the Middle Ages, when Roma weren't allowed to possess land and were excluded from society like the Jews. It was impossible to get to the guild system so they had to work on their own to take care of their families. There already was mistrust between medieval society and the Roma. Antiziganism/antigypsyism was present like anti-

Semitism. Decrees were enforced and Roma were outlawed. In the Netherlands the focus on law and order is a constant characteristic of Dutch policies towards Roma and Sinti and caravan dwellers since the 1870s. The involvement of justice and police has a similar history; since 1928 the Dutch gendarmerie actively started to collect data on 'Gypsies'.

In 1936 there was a proposal (never realized) to set up a central point for registering 'Gypsies', a so-called 'zigeunercentrale'. When, in May 1944, the 'Gypsies' had to be deported to Westerbork and via Westerbork to Auschwitz, the Dutch police was responsible for collecting Roma, Sinti and caravan dwellers. The caravan dwellers later on could go home, because they weren't categorized as 'Gypsies'. The Roma and Sinti were imprisoned and deported to Auschwitz. Only a very few people returned. Whenever new groups of Roma in the Netherlands, -in 1870 the Kaldarash and Ursari from the former Habsburg Empire, in the 1920s en 30s Sinti and Roma from Belgium, France and Germany, in the 1970s the from Yugoslavia and Italy, in the 1990s from Central Europe and the then dissolving Yugoslavia and since 2005-2007 from Romania and Bulgaria-, they were or have been approached with suspicion based on negative labelling and stereotypes, stigmatized and criminalized. Even today there is a special division at the police which concerns itself with 'Romani-crime', so where ethnicity is automatically linked to crime.

This brings me to the discussion about ethnic registration. Before I go into that, I will have to tell you about the situation of Roma in 2010. In the Volkskrant of the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2010 there was an article with the following headline: "Roma afraid of witch hunt". I was the one of the people who was interviewed for this article and I mentioned the witch hunt. This was based on the expulsions of Roma from France at that time. I thought of the persecutions in the Middle Ages, hence the term witch hunt.

Roma in the Netherlands feared more discrimination, stigmatization and even expulsion. People were shocked about what happened in France. The elderly people saw images of the past and the youngsters, most of them born here, doubted about their future and if they would get the chance to build up their lives here. Also non-Roma were shocked about the massive expulsions and at political levels feelings were running high.

While, initially, the media attention paid to France was one of rejection, the situation totally changed when a Dutch MP suggested that Roma in the Netherlands, when they 'behave badly', may also face expulsion in the future. She mixed up Dutch citizens with a Romani background with the Romanian and Bulgarian Roma in France by referring to statistics on crimes that may have been committed by Roma in the Dutch municipality Nieuwegein. The Roma who are staying here legally for many years, but who have an ID with 'unknown nationality' or even 'stateless', really feared a witch hunt-like situation. I will come back to this issue later in my presentation.

Then at the same time, a tabloid-like Dutch daily newspaper focused on stereotyping of a Romani family. The two items had an opposite effect: The Roma were blamed, rather than protected. Thus, even while more subtle remarks were made by a number of people including politicians, like the mayor of Utrecht and MP's of D'66, SP and GroenLinks, the trend to stigmatize was firmly set and a subtle public debate was almost made impossible.

It was in this climate that critical Dutch media revealed that some Dutch municipalities were illegitimately registering Roma on the basis of ethnicity. Veerle Vroon wrote an article about it in the Groene Amsterdammer of 21<sup>th</sup> of September 2010. Yet, there was almost no debate on this issue, even while the municipality Ede had illegally registered for more than 10 years and had probably violated

Dutch laws on more than 3 points. In contrast, the mayor of Nieuwegein started to defend ethnic registration as a so-called good instrument to deal with the Roma in the Netherlands.

Ethnic registration is a dangerous instrument in my opinion, and it always backfires with terrible consequences. Ethnic registration is in fact labelling people's race and descent, which leads to ranking and social exclusion. If you're not from the 'right race' there will be more obstacles for you in society. Also it is not realistic, as we are a multiethnic society today, with a lot of people of mixed race, so then you have to show the whole of your family tree in order to define your ethnicity.

I don't think I have to explain where this is going if ethnic registration would be justified and legally accepted....

This takes me the other issue I have been working on for several years, namely the issue of statelessness amongst Roma or the fact of having an unknown nationality. This concerns a minority within the Roma minority. For example the Roma of Greece generally don't have this problem, because they are acknowledged as Greek citizens. It is their own choice if they want to add Roma to it or not in their papers. I will focus on the Dutch situation. In the Netherlands the Roma are not recognized as a minority. The people who came here in the 1970s could stay eventually because of the Generaal Pardon. They came with caravans to the Netherlands, after travelling around in Yugoslavia and other countries.

Some of them received Dutch passports, some of them didn't, and they received a licence to stay here, marked with 'unknown nationality', 'stateless' or 'Yugoslavian'. A lot of them were children at that time. Until now, these children who are now grownups, they cannot get a nationality. This also goes for their children, as statelessness or an unknown nationality is inherited until the third generation. We don't know the 'lus sanguini' here as in the USA, but sometimes if you are born here and stayed here in the country it would be possible to apply for naturalization.

The procedure to prove that you are stateless de jure takes a very long time and is very difficult. I know some people who are working on this for more than 10 years or even 20 years. Most of them are stateless de facto, so that complicates the situation even more. When Yugoslavia dissolved in the 1990s, Roma in the Netherlands received a letter from the municipality, which said that they had to prove whether they were Croat, Bosnian or Serb. They couldn't prove it at that time, so after a few months they were written out of the system, so they couldn't have a house, work, education or health care anymore. After 35 years the issue of not having a nationality or having an unknown nationality hasn't been solved. On the contrary, the solution still seems to be far away. Even while it has been brought to attention of politicians at the national level, by me and my network's efforts, there is no breakthrough yet. There are Roma who are being sent to detention centres, even while they obviously cannot be 'repatriated' since no country will accept them. This way illegality can be created at the same time that illegality will be or is punishable. This could imply that stateless Roma, including their children, will end up in jail or constantly need to run to avoid to be put in custody.

This is very worrying of course. The UNHCR has made a report in 2011 about the issue of statelessness, and they also wrote an article about a Romani family in the Netherlands to give an impression about statelessness in daily life. The question of human rights is being discussed also. It is important that all parties involved look together for solutions. The dialogue must go on and in fact you have move faster in working on solutions, otherwise the situation gets worse and another generation is lost. The issue of statelessness and nationality law is very complicated and each case must be looked at one by one. Still it's important to realize that Roma don't have an own region or country to go to which should be taken

into account. It is a delicate subject, because it can also backfire. That's why it must be handled with care.

What did we see in the past?

Already in the Middle Ages we saw persecution, murder and witch hunts. People were socially excluded from society because of their descent. Also we saw this in the centuries afterwards.

Antiziganism/antigypsyism and anti-Semitism already existed and it has never been gone. It was always present below the surface.

Could you say that the genocide of the Second World War was in fact was the coup de grâce, the mortal blow? I will try to answer that.

The genocide of the Second World War was premeditated murder; it was systematically prepared, planned and organized, step by step. Men and women were specially trained to kill men, women and children without scruples. In almost every European country authorities worked together with the Nazis on the deportation of many, many citizens of that country. Because of the Neurenberger laws, enacted in 1935, people were categorized by race and descent in order to destroy them. Razzias were held already and people were imprisoned. People were betrayed and robbed of all their possessions before their deportation. The Kristallnacht of the 9<sup>th</sup> of November in 1938 was a sign of that it was legally accepted to kill people of another descent. The Roma who lived on the Krim were almost all killed before 1942. After the Wannsee conference in 1941, the deportation and the killing of Roma, Sinti and Jews accelerated and already before this conference more than 40.000 of them were killed. 2 million people were murdered in the concentration camps of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka under the codename Aktion Reinhard; this was one of the largest non-military operations of the Second World War during 1942-1943. Already before the war started, Roma, Sinti and Jews were brutally treated, ethnically registered, criminalized and stigmatized by the authorities and the media. Families lost three or four generations of their kin in one single moment; that's why you maybe could say that the genocide was the coup de grâce, the mortal blow.

What do we see today?

We see neo-nazist and fascist parties rising, expanding and consolidating their networks worldwide; we observe attacks on Roma, Sinti and Jews again. Do we realize the danger of this? We see a lot of people living in ghettos, hunted down from one place to another. I know Roma who are afraid to say that they are Roma; they prefer to say that they're Greek, Spanish or Italian. They also teach their children to do this. This is purely out of fear for racial discrimination. The traumas of the Second World War are still in the minds and in the hearts of people, whether they are young or old. The elderly didn't want to talk about the war, because it was too painful. Some of them told fragments or just spoke in a few words about it. With those fragments, in those few words, they told us their history. That, we must respect and remember as we do today.

Looking at the future, it should never be forgotten. *'In the past lies the present, and in the present lies the future.'*

## Then and Now: The 1930s crisis and the Situation of Roma in Hungary Today

Dr János Bársony - Ágnes Daróczy

### Introduction

There are many similarities between the world economic crisis of 1929-33 and the current economic crisis in terms of the social context, namely, high unemployment, increasing hardship and piles of unsellable goods. It turned out that huge production capacities are unnecessary, outdated, cheaper to produce elsewhere, unfeasible to operate, alongside a declining trend in consumption. Relatively cheap loans often granted without sufficient coverage are impossible to repay at both a state, corporate and individual level. This is what paralyzes the economy at an international and national level alike. There is a general air of exasperation, insecurity and fear of what the future may bring. This backdrop engenders nostalgia for **strong order** and power, **ignoring the value of freedom**. It creates scapegoating mechanisms by inducing predatory and aggressive tensions against the groups **“deemed responsible”** for the trouble. (See international capitalists: decoded as against Jews or the “unworthy” competitors for state social resources, decoded as Gypsies).

Besides similarities, there are also **major differences**. A *comme il faut* approach is neither characteristic around the world, nor in Europe. On the contrary, having learned from the experiences of the 20th century, the dissemination of ideology based on racial superiority and such practices and acts of aggression are punishable on paper, in accordance with international agreements. (See: international ban on Apartheid criminal acts, declaring racial discrimination an international criminal act, ban on discrimination in education, and so on).

Consequently, while the “spirit of the era” ensured every potential for raising racists ideologies to power at the beginning of the 20th century, and using state bodies to achieve this, this phenomenon is at least legally constrained today and other nations may step up against it.

The other difference is that, at present, there isn't any strong state supporting racial superiority movements.

At the same time, it is a well-known fact that racist acts are committed quite frequently, and neither the police, nor the magistrates are sufficiently prepared to deal with these. Courts in Hungary tolerate its barely masked forms. (See the case of the Gánti brothers convicted innocently and the legal explanation put forth by the judge in respect of compensation claims; proceedings initiated against the Gypsy communities in Sajóbáony, Ózd and Miskolc defending their case during the onslaught of the series of murder series committed against Roma. In Hungary today, only Gypsies have been sent to prison for committing crimes with a racist intent.)

### Situation of the emancipation of Roma during the 1930s

#### 1. *Legal equality and discrimination*

- Ethnic: ban on native language education and ethnic cultural representation – lack of institutions and intellectuals; shockwave of the Peace Treaty of Trianon; forced Hungarian assimilation;
- “Race ideology” and general assumption of unreliability; feeling of superiority;
- Portrayal of Gypsies: romantic, instinctive musicians, lazy, inferior, wild beast spreading germs; hereditary criminals, alien trash to be kept under control; pathetic primitive unsophisticated groups born to vegetate;

- Number and ratio of individuals classified Gypsy and its underlying criteria and who decides on this (wandering Gypsy, belongs to the Gypsy race, musician, native language, admitting that they “live like a Gypsy”).

## 2. *Outside the barriers of constitutionality: denial of rights*

Housing: Vast majority rural population, 90% living far away from the village or at the edge of the village; Act 15000 of 1916 on Ban on Relocation, residence on communal land; land ownership and tolerated; state of the houses and “wandering Gypsies”; settled wandering Gypsies; integration of urban ghettos, lack of property ownership.

Education: primary education has been mandatory for nearly 70 years, in spite of which around 80% of Gypsies are illiterate; secondary and higher education is inaccessible to them (with the exception of a handful of individuals from musician families). Perceivable, widely known and accepted sabotage on behalf of local public administration and the general public.

Personal and public security: regular razzias; “gendarmerie visits” to slum districts, internment for leaving their place of residence. Domestic forced labour (cleaning the gendarmerie headquarters, parish hall free of charge, clearing snow and roads); voivode supervision spy network; money given to and handled by the village chief, denial of accumulation of assets; ban on keeping horses, ban on going to fairs, cannot stand as a witness before the court. Anyone may be a wandering Gypsy at any given moment, the given gendarme or village chief issues these privileges; day-to-day humiliation and being subjected to acts of aggression; lack of political capital and network of contacts.

Healthcare, social policy: forced bathing and shaving of hair; setting slum districts ablaze; being humiliated, minimum access to medication, lower life expectancy, exclusion from social welfare, and ban on begging.

## 3. *Subsistence strategies, stratification*

- Agricultural servant existence: seasonal work on large farms, domestic services, patriarch agricultural exchange schemes, auxiliary services, small industry services and trade.
- urban slum integration existence: factory worker, musician, trading, mining metallurgy.
- Ethnic heterogeneity:
  - by native language (Hungarian, Romany, and Beas)
  - by means of earning a living: musician, blacksmith, making clay bricks, wood-carving, weaving, etc.
  - by traditional clan trades: Lovar, Masar, Khelderar, Patrinar, Colar, Csurar, Drizar, etc.

## 4. *Hungarian Roma and the Holocaust*

- At the periphery of the Holocaust, dispersed;
- Unreliable, alienated in war, crisis; racial instigation, passing legislation and testing personal relationships, salvation.
- War ideology: anyone who is not with us is with the enemy; total warfare; no morality, anything can be done to them; either them or us, it doesn’t matter whether they are good or bad, the only thing that matters is that they are aliens which we should feed, even though we don’t have enough to eat. If the enemy wins, they will take revenge on us.
- Let’s work, starve them to death; kill the bread-eater in the name of victory. Forced labour camps, internment, murders.

##### *5. What happened up to the era of political changes (before 1989?)*

- Justice was not served among those that were not the winners;
- Rights continued to be denied in spite of the equality “declared”;
- Agrarian reform and rebuilding; ongoing cold war economy, 1956 Revolution;
- Automated large-scale production reaches the edge of villages; migration to cities, commuting, decolonisation, open suppression eases;
- Formation of cooperatives, machinery in villages; dynasties of unskilled workers, together with peasants in cities;
- Levelling: elimination of slum districts, primary education, full-employment, “disciplined citizens” under total control, “elimination” of Gypsies = elimination of arrears;
- Emergence, suppression and manipulation of the Roma emancipation movement; Roma existential insecurity, communities breaking up, ethnic unification;
- Resources running out, sand in the machinery: myth of over-funding, Gypsy criminals, poverty = Gypsy = own fault;
- Concessions towards integration: National Gypsy Council (OCT), Romany Cultural Alliance (MCKSZ), offset: spy network, Gypsy crime propaganda, ideological leaders .
- Creating pseudo non-governmental organisations and independent Gypsy organisation representing the opposition: Phralipe-Amalipe

##### *6. Political changes and economic restructuring*

- Loss of market, dissolution of COMECON, free influx of western goods and capital, entire industrial sectors shut down (mining, metallurgy, construction, textile industry) because of privatisation and lack of competitiveness.
- Loss of 1.5 million jobs, of which only 800,000 have been recreated 20 years down the road. Roma people are sent back from the cities as unemployed individuals to villages which were incapable of ensuring a living ever before.
- Introduction of mass secondary and higher education (for 60-70% of each age group, while Roma people are still struggling to complete primary and secondary education).
- Fresh graduates are unable to find jobs; the competition battle under the surface increases between age-groups, various types of settlements, social classes and political camps. The fight for privatised assets followed by the fight for state social and development resources throughout a lifetime keeping people alive.
- The welfare state is continually falling apart due to the lack of financing bodies (the welfare assistance fund is depleted, lack of resources for education, healthcare, dealing with unemployment, culture, and so on. Redistribution potential decreases; there is not enough money to make the state function in villages. More and more people take justice into their own hands, steal food and live in existential insecurity.

##### *7. Pointing at the scapegoat, target*

- Fear of becoming a victim; rule of law cannot be maintained in villages
- Competition for local resources and existential insecurity
- Inter-ethnic contacts are diminishing dramatically (slum, segregation at school, no common workplaces) and replaced by the image mediated by the media
- Stealing food, usury and mafia criminal acts are spreading

- “Gypsy crime”, as a lead,: placing the blame on the victims, the alien is the guilty one and not us, not personally, hence wartime ideology being re-embraced
- The old over-assisted myth and the liberal culture praising “otherness” kicks back
- Communicational racism: “Gypsy image” in the media (portrayed as dangerous, hostile, pathetic mob, wearing heaps of gold, aggressively *nouveau riche* pretending to be sophisticated, close-up of criminals on an ethnic backdrop and spot light; creating unrest, aggressive, loud and shocking; jokes about how the community is a parasite, daily horrifying stories of criminal acts, etc.)

#### 8. *Anti-Gypsyism as an internal war threat*

- Racism forming a movement: we are not at home in our own country; international capital (Jewish) exploits us and “Gypsy criminals” living in the country terrorise us. Fight against parasites (Gypsies relying on welfare), instead of against poverty.
- Renaissance of wartime ideology on the domestic front; organised communicational warfare, organised disciplinary and law and order maintenance racist terrorist acts of aggression (Hungarian Guard = new Hungarian SS), ethical values do not count when it comes to Gypsies and rule of law (series of Roma murders, communicational character assassinations, penalising expeditions to Gypsy slums)
- Racism organised in a political party with the aim of clinching and using political power and the state to protect the majority against the “enemy”. Generational driving force: the revenge of the educated young generation unable to find work meets Arrow Cross traditions which the country has never managed to confront and get over. The blindness of the political powers in constant battle makes it possible for the extreme party to rise to power as the laughing third party.

#### 9. *Methods of creating enemies:*

- Being excluded from the economy is their own fault
- Exploiters of state welfare, unworthy people (in the competition for resources)
- They do not have any primary labour market
- Lack of support for mobility within the country and among trades and professions (enforcing the rights of educators, as opposed to those educated)
- Economic development does not automatically imply improvement in the case of the most deprived, marginalised
- We live as a mass of people, instead of individuals
- Denial of our human face, individual responsibility
- Special focus on serious acts of crime as Gypsy specialities
- Situations not dealt with, ruination of rule of law
- Exclusion of the unwanted

### **Discussions**

#### Why don't we use the term Holocaust in stead of Roma genocide?

For most people the term Holocaust refers to the genocide on Jews. Mainly Jewish institutions prefer to exclusively use the term Holocaust for the Jews genocide. Many Roma and Sinti organizations again feel excluded: “Even about the dead people, a political struggle is going on”. When Roma and Sinti talk about the ‘forgotten Holocaust’ every person will know what it

is about. It is an ongoing discussion also amongst scientists and within the ITF. Using definitions and terms is also a matter of power.

Can we compare the 1930s with the current situation?

No, because the economic situation is completely different with the globalization of economics. Yes, when we see the growing economic crisis, the fear and uncertainty among the people, process of exclusion of minorities, the failing of the welfare systems as a consequence of neo-liberalism, the scapegoating of Roma and Sinti as the minority group with the least power and external support, the growing tensions between 'the settled' and the growing group of Roma and Sinti depending on social security, etc.

One Roma participant compared the social climate in the Netherlands 20 years ago with the current situation. "I feel much more uncomfortable as Roma; the negative attitude towards Roma is growing".

Just as the 'assimilated' Jews, many Sinti in Germany in the 1930s lived in houses, had respected jobs, higher education and were hardly recognizable as Sinti. Only due to the registration system was it easy to identify them.

**Closing statement: "The one who does not remember the past is bound to live through it again".**

Mr. Henry Scicluna

This statement by the Spanish-American philosopher Santayana, inscribed on a plaque at the Auschwitz concentration camp, could be a fitting sub-title to this conference today.

We must not only remember the tragic events of the past: we must also analyse with lucidity the events of today. The genocide of the Jews and the Roma during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War did not come about overnight. It was preceded by a long period of gestation fed by hateful remarks, discriminatory actions, false reports, alarmist statements and stereotypes – a period of gestation which created the environment for the development of an ideology based on racial superiority.

We thought that ideology had died with its profounder: we were wrong.

It is very revealing that 60 years later, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, in a Recommendation on combating anti-gypsyism and discrimination against Roma, adopted in June 2011, defines anti-gypsyism as "a specific form of racism, an ideology founded on racial superiority, a form of dehumanisation and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed, amongst others by violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatisation and the most blatant kind of discrimination." The Commission observed that "in spite of everything, the situation of Roma in most member states remains alarming and that the signs of anti-gypsyism are continually increasing and worsening".

The warning was timely. In 2011 events had taken an ugly turn for the worse.

In an address to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in October, 2011, Mr. Schokkenbroek, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma issues,

expressed his consternation that segregation of Roma exists in 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe. He stressed that anti-gypsyism was widespread and intense and needed to be addressed urgently. He referred to violent aggressions and provocations against the Roma that had occurred during the last few months in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Hungary and which had prompted both the Parliamentary Assembly and the Secretary General to express their deep concern.

In the light of these dramatic events the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in February, 2012 adopted a statement deploring “the notable increase of serious incidents in a number of member states, including serious cases of racist violence, stigmatising anti-Roma rhetoric and generalisation of criminal behaviour” and expressed “its deep concern about the rise of anti-gypsyism, anti-Roma rhetoric and violent attacks against Roma.” It exhorted governments and public authorities at all levels to be vigilant not to use Roma as easy targets and scapegoats, in particular in times of economic crisis.” The events in Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Hungary hit the headlines. The daily tribulations of the Roma throughout Europe are however passed over in silence in the media. The report of Mr Hammerberg, until recently Commissioner for Human Rights, on Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe is a stunning inventory of injustices covering anti-gypsy rhetoric, police abuse, coercive sterilisation, segregated schools, lack of access to health care and employment, forced removal of children from their biological parents, destruction of property, statelessness and collective expulsions. He summarises these constant humiliations in an interview given to European Voice on 11 April, 2012 He says: “The collective stigmatisation of Roma and Travellers continues. Children are often segregated and bullied in schools. Adults face discrimination in the job market or when seeking health care. In many cases Roma families have to dwell in slum areas....A number of them have been evicted from their shacks without having been given an alternative habitat. In many cases the local authorities make clear they just want them to go away. When migrating they are not welcome anywhere in Europe”.

Enough to make every European blush with shame.

The report should be read and reflected upon by all those who have so far failed to make the connection between the tragic events of the past and the events of today. Some are too blatant to pass unnoticed. Let me just recall that in 1926 fascist Italy issued a circular ordering the expulsion of all foreign Roma to “cleanse the country of Gypsy caravans which, needless to recall, constitute a risk to safety and public health by virtue of the characteristic Gypsy life style.”

Shall we remain silent longer?

On the occasion of the award of the European Civil Rights Prize of the Sinti and Roma to Mr Hammerberg in April 2012, Ms Maud de Boer –Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, remarked in her address that “there is a destructive silence around the Roma victims of the Second World War.” There was silence at Nuremberg and that silence persists for all the injustices committed against them since the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and up to this very day. It persists not only among the public and the media, except to denounce their petty thefts and misdemeanours; it persists amongst governments and national institutions.

In his report on the Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe, which I mentioned earlier on, Mr Hammerberg deplores that “at a number of key moments, member states have

rendered European-level calls to tackle Roma and Travellers' exclusion hollow, by openly flouting those expressions of concern". He even complains that "European institutions responded with caution to policies evidently destructive of the fundamental rights of Roma in Italy and France".

In the face of a complacent and indifferent majority and the aggressive stunt of an ever-increasing minority, will it suffice to raise the alarm?

I think that the Council of Europe, as a human rights organisation, could not and has not been silent in voicing its concern. . The texts I quoted earlier on prove it. But we have gone further. If we want to stop the tide of hatred and distrust we have to work on creating a new environment of mutual trust and respect between Roma and non-Roma .

This is neither the place nor the moment for a detailed description of our activities in this sector but it is useful to mention that the Strasbourg Declaration adopted on the occasion of the High-Level Meeting in 2010 gave a new impetus to the work of the Council of Europe on Roma issues. Foremost amongst the innovations, and most relevant to a change of environment, is the setting up of a European Training Programme for Roma mediators in education, health and employment (ROMED). Mediators have been used successfully in a number of member states and have been instrumental not only in solving problems but in establishing trust and confidence between the Roma, the non-Roma and the authorities. We have drawn up a human rights- based programme and we are working hard to ensure we will have trained around a 1000 mediators in 20 member states by the end of the year.

An online data base of good practices has also been set up and a European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion – a framework for capacity-building, exchanging information and good practice - is in preparation. The Dosta! campaign addressing prejudice and stereotypes towards Roma has now been introduced in 14 countries and the committee of governmental experts on Roma issues (CAHROM) is developing thematic groups on developments in specific countries.

These activities are supplemented by bi-annual conferences for the empowerment of women and by training courses for lawyers on using the human rights standards of the European Court of Human Rights and the European Committee on Social Rights in defending Roma rights before national courts. We also work with Roma youth organisations to bolster their potential as agents for change. It is our hope that these practical activities will help in establishing trust and confidence between the Roma and the non-Roma.

Trust has to be mutual but, following the Roma genocide and all the persecutions and discriminations which the Roma have suffered over the last 60 years, the Roma are entitled to expect a sign of reconciliation from the majority.

Mr Hammarberg, in his report which I mentioned earlier on, proposes that truth commissions be established "in a number of European countries to establish the truth about the mass atrocities against the Roma people. Ideally, this should be a Europe-wide undertaking. A full account and recognition of these crimes might go some way in restoring trust amongst the Roma towards the wider society."

Truth commissions have been experienced in a few European countries on specific issues – Roma genocide, forced sterilisation. More is needed. Truth commissions that recognise the

genocide of the Roma and all the persecutions, discriminations and marginalisation of the Roma to this day would, in our view, go a long way in establishing the mutual trust that is needed for a cohesive society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Time is running out. Extreme right-wing parties are mushrooming all over Europe and acquiring credibility and legitimacy. We are in the middle of an economic crisis where people look for scapegoats to direct frustrations. We have to act now – if not, we are going to relive the past.

May I finish with a famous saying which is unfortunately often forgotten?

Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

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Useful websites mentioned by Mr. Scicluna

<http://goodpracticeroma.ppa.coe.int>

<http://www.romagenocide.org>

[www.dosta-coe.org](http://www.dosta-coe.org)

[www.coe.int/web/coe-portal/roma](http://www.coe.int/web/coe-portal/roma)

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