

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

The Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) was founded in 1991 in anticipation of the serious interethnic conflicts that were to erupt following the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. PER conducts programs of high-level intervention and dialogue and serves as a neutral mediator in several major disputes in the region. PER also conducts programs of training, education, and research at international, national, and community levels.

PER is supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, with additional funding from the Starr Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the Council of Europe.

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JULY 26, 1999

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

STATE POLICIES TOWARD
ROMANI COMMUNITIES IN
CANDIDATE COUNTRIES TO
THE EU: GOVERNMENT AND
ROMANI PARTICIPATION IN
POLICY-MAKING

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PREFACE

Constructive dialogue among government officials and Romani organizations is key toward designing effective state policies that reflect the needs of Romani communities. The cooperative work of government officials and Romani organizations in government/Romani partnerships is critical for both improving the situation for the Roma and fulfilling the European Commission's criteria for accession.

The Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) in cooperation with the European Commission Directorate General 1A sponsored a roundtable with government representatives of candidate countries to the European Union and Romani organizations on July 26, 1999 in Brussels, Belgium. The objective of the meeting was to encourage partnership relations between government officials and the Roma in the preparation and implementation of state policies toward the Roma in candidate countries to the EU. Throughout the course of the discussion it became evident that such partnerships are beneficial for all sides involved.

In addition to providing participants the opportunity to learn first hand about the expectations and procedures of the accession process, the meeting provided an environment in which governments were able to increase their awareness of the Roma's needs and learn from their perspectives. Most importantly, it allowed participants the opportunity to work together in devising recommendations for policy. Participants emphasized that the role of the Roma should go beyond consultative status to being active participants with decision-making powers when creating programs and policies that affect them.

The meeting was important in several respects. For example, the openness of the discussion provided a forum for the Romani community to urge governmental agencies and ministries to recognize the need for



From left to right: Laszlo Teleki, Antal Heizer, Nicolae Gheorghe, Andrzej Mirga, Petr Uhl, Monika Horakova.



From left to right: Peter Atanassov, Nadejda Anguelska, Dimitar Petrov Gheorghiev.

cooperation. In addition, participants recognized the advantages of forming a working partnership among Romani leaders, governments and the EC. The meeting also provided the opportunity to stimulate a regional approach to address these issues. Countries that had already pursued a joint-partnership in the creation of policies for the Roma received increased visibility for their efforts, while other countries were able to learn from these already functioning programs.

This report represents a summary of the discussion held in Brussels. The report was prepared by Jennifer Tanaka, consultant on Romani issues in the region, and edited by Ann Marie Grocholski and Warren R. Haffar of PER's Princeton staff and Robert A. Feldmesser, PER's Senior Editor. The participants have not reviewed the text, for which PER assumes sole responsibility.

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Princeton, New Jersey

November, 1999

OPENING REMARKS

In opening the roundtable, PER's president pointed out that Romani leaders and other persons working on Romani issues have succeeded in putting these issues on the European and international agendas. There is now a clear need for instruments of social change, which require political will and accurate information, and must operate in a context of prejudice, discrimination, and a lack of social consensus. The EU can play a critical role in the creation of such instruments, owing to the strength of its membership, its interest in social policies in accession countries, the criteria of human rights and democracy that it has established, and its concern with regional issues such as the crossing of borders, as recently exhibited in the migration of a number of Slovak Roma to Finland. It is in everyone's interest to translate needs into actions.

A representative of the DG 1A explained that the political criteria for EU membership reflect the principles that are applied within the EU under Article F of its convention. More recently, the need to protect and promote human rights was spelled out in the Amsterdam treaty, and member states are obliged to implement the provisions of this treaty. Countries seeking accession to the EU will have to make further improvements in the situation of Roma, though admittedly there is no recipe for instant success. He stressed the need to fight prejudice and racism, especially in the media and public services, while improving access to education, employment, health care, and housing.

The purpose of this meeting was therefore to assess not policies, but Romani participation in policy-making.

The representative went on to say that these governments should be making efforts to bring Roma into the policy-making process. The purpose of this meeting was therefore to assess not policies, but Romani participation in policy-making. The EU is ready to assist in improving the situation of Roma, as shown by the two million euros granted to the Romanian government for this purpose, and further funds will be made available in the years to come.

He concluded by saying that it was important to allay the fears of large-scale migrations that exist in the EU countries by taking concrete steps to improve the situation of Roma, so that there would be no impetus for such migrations.

The chairman of the PER Romani Advisory Council (PERRAC) urged that a distinction be made between policies and projects. Although there may be legislative backing and budgetary provisions for certain policies, public and political support is needed to turn these policies into concrete

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projects. This support could be generated through debates in parliament and the media and through taxes that taxpayers were willing to approve. Governments should not be content with “showcase” programs and wishful thinking, but instead should follow approaches that are realistic in terms of both time and resources.

The development of such approaches is challenging, but policies that have limited time frames and little impact will not meet the needs of the Romani communities or their organizations.

It is important that policy-makers identify the message they intend to send to the Roma and develop the conceptual framework and wording of their policies accordingly. The state’s motivation for policies should not rest exclusively on EC Agenda 2000 and related financial prospects. Rather, since many of the problems confronting the Roma arise out of weak points of democratic institutions and the rule of law in given countries, concrete steps to address these weaknesses in the course of formulating specific policies toward the Roma may also be seen as steps toward the strengthening of democracy in a given country.

THE EUROPEAN APPROACH TO THE ROMANI ISSUE FOR CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

The enlargement process

A representative of the EC observed that, while the EU has many pressing objectives concerning market conditions, the monetary union, and the Maastricht Treaty, enlargement of membership is a clear priority. In this respect, there are already activities under way, such as the “twinning program,”—which pairs experts from candidate countries with their counterparts in member states with a view

toward improving administration in their own countries—and the “European conference,” in which all candidate countries participate.

There are, he said, three main dimensions to the accession process. First is the pre-accession strategy, involving certain agreements, a monitoring program, accession partnerships, timetables, and funding of some 3.12 billion euro/year. Romani issues must be addressed as part of this strategy. Second, there are regular reports, providing information for judging the situation in view of the Copenhagen criteria. Here, human-rights and other nongovernmental organizations can play an important role. Third are the negotiations leading to accession. These negotiations are divided into “chapters.” Among the most difficult of these chapters are those concerning the movement of goods and the movement of capital, services, migration, the environment, and agriculture. Some of these chapters have not yet even been opened. Thus, it is too early to speak of a date for accession. Nonetheless, a system is in place and the process is on track. Regular reports are being prepared, along with comments on the progress of the “acquis communautaire” and new provisions of the Helsinki document. With regard to the political criteria of the “acquis communautaire,” the Roma often present the most serious problems, and the EU has therefore stepped up its support in this area.

Romani issues in the pre-accession context

Accession documents identify areas that should be focused on. Among other things, they point to the need to improve the situation of Roma in the medium term in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia.

The sources of information for assessing the situation include local and Western NGOs, international institutions, EC delegation reports, and reports from the governments of the candidate countries themselves. Some key indicators are whether international conventions concerning human rights have been signed and ratified; the existence and character of relevant provisions of national legislation, especially provisions on discrimination and on punishment for racial attacks; and the enforcement of such laws. Whether or not governments have strategies and programs to improve the situation of the Roma, and whether Romani representatives possess decision-making powers concerning their own situation, are also important criteria. Programs should be backed by budgetary provisions at national and local levels, although the latter is often problematic.

The main instrument for providing funding of efforts to improve the situation of Roma in Central and East European countries is Phare, an EU program launched in 1989 to help candidate countries make the changes necessary for EU membership. Until 1998, Phare's support was directed mainly to NGOs, either through national schemes (100,000 euros for each country) or through wider schemes such as the Phare Democracy program and Phare LIEN. With the establishment of the accession partnerships in 1998, EC support has been guided by the priorities set by accession countries. In this way, additional support for Romani issues has been made available. The two million euros of Phare funds granted to the Romanian government in 1998 were mentioned again. In addition, the Czech government will receive up to one million euros to raise the level of education, including public awareness and a media campaign. In 1999, Bulgaria will receive half a million euros for education projects, including the training of Roma in public administration.

Country perspectives

In responding to the presentations, a representative of the Czech government said that, in his opinion, the current system is not working well, and so the prospects are such that success cannot be guaranteed. The strategy of cooperation on Romani issues on a country-by-country basis does not do justice to the situation. The EC should monitor the whole process and give details about what is required. This does not exclude "horizontal" cooperation, but the EC should shoulder more of the responsibility, while still working together with national governments.

He pointed out that there are two kinds of Romani-related issues: the social and the ethnic. Currently, the social problems are so urgent that ethnic emancipation cannot yet be addressed. Funds from both national governments and the EC are needed to improve the social situation. On the other hand, the xenophobia and similar sentiments in these countries must be addressed, and there is a need for legislation that provides mechanisms obliging local authorities to refrain from repressing Romani communities, as is the case in some small villages and towns where the situation has not changed much since the nineteenth century.

The Slovak governmental representative stated that more than 16 percent of his country's population is not ethnic Slovak, so that the nation must develop a multicultural, multiethnic society. In this light, the way to improve the situation of the Roma is through cooperation at local and national levels, together with international organizations. He made par-

ticular mention of the minority tolerance program, which has received funding of 1,800, 000 euros for the purpose of educating the public and enhancing local democracy and for a minority development program. He added that cooperation among countries, including cooperation among the four Visegrad countries, was also an important factor.

The representative of the Hungarian government stated that his country must seek a consensus on the issue of minorities, including the Roma. Assistance from the EU or other international organizations would be welcome, but there is a need to mobilize national funds as well. The problems concerning the Roma are not simply a question of Hungarian accession to the EU; there has been legislation on this subject since 1995.

This year, the legislative package contains an action program that sets tasks in the fields of education, culture, employment, agriculture, regional policy, social affairs, health care, anti-discrimination, and communication—in all, 41 tasks, to be implemented by various ministries and other national organs. Priority is assigned to the tasks concerning education and culture.

The Romani representative from Hungary read a letter from the president of the National Minority Self-government, in which support of the accession of Hungary to the EU was expressed, along with hopes that the process would contribute to the improvement of the situation of the Roma, especially in the areas of education and social conditions. European assistance was held to be particularly important. The letter also noted that several positive changes have already occurred, such as the new political rights of the Roma, the appointment of representatives to policy-making positions, and the establishment of a cultural center, along with some successes in agriculture. A momentum is now building toward the integration of the Roma, especially in education. It would be desirable to institute educational programs for the Roma throughout not only Hungary but all of Europe.

A representative of the European Commission observed that, although priorities are identified and set by the EU and the accession partnerships,

The EC expects governments to share in the financing of accession-related activities, as a way of acknowledging its responsibility and assuring some degree of sustainability.

and commitments are made to provide funding, the responsibility for designing policies lies with the national governments. How they carry out that responsibility, in terms of consultations with minorities, the

What is the vision of the European Commission and how do the Roma fit into this vision?

incorporation of their views, and the degree and form of decentralization, are decisions made by each country. Furthermore, the EC expects governments to share in the financing of accession-related activities, as a way of acknowledging its

responsibility and assuring some degree of sustainability. However, there are regional dimensions, and there the EC has the role of a facilitator.

Another participant said that he opposed lodging responsibility with anyone other than the national governments, in cooperation with the Roma. It is they who must develop policies toward the Roma and guarantee their rights as citizens. They should not be permitted to share this responsibility with partners. He called attention to certain terms that are sometimes referred to as possible "political visions" of these societies: "social integration," "equal participation," "tolerance toward minorities," and "cultural emancipation." But, he asked, "what is the vision of the European Commission and how do the Roma fit into this vision?" He stressed that this is not meant to diminish the responsibility of the states, but is rather a way to promote a dialogue and the emergence of common perspectives.

In response, a member of the European Parliament described its vision as one of extending and ensuring democracy in Europe through implementation of the basic tenets of civil rights. The demand is not that all social and economic problems be solved, but that civil and political rights be achieved. For example, Greece was not necessarily up to standards in the social and economic fields, but in terms of political criteria, it was acceptable for accession. Democracy in Europe, he continued, is constantly evolving, and the Roma need to find their place in this evolution, first as part of their national communities, which are in turn part of the European integration process. The main concern within the EU is that the problems that inevitably arise in the course of transition to a new social engine should not be exported to the EU. In addition, new elections have recently been held for the European Parliament, and its new members must be persuaded of the importance of EU enlargement.

Another participant suggested that if democracy is the vision, it should not be taken for granted that Romani leaders are necessarily democratic. They, like others in society, need to be educated.

The fight against racism

The importance of combating racism in the candidate countries was stressed in a communication from the Commission on Countering Racism, Xenophobia and Anti-Semitism in the Candidate Countries (Brussels, May 26, 1999). The communication states, "Whilst the situation of minorities in the CEEC [Central and East European countries] candidate countries has generally improved in recent years, considerable efforts still need to be made as far as the Roma minorities are concerned."

The communication contains information on the Action Plan against Racism (March 25, 1998), which is to prepare "the ground for more ambitious action at the European level under the new provisions of the Treaty on non-discrimination, in particular in terms of legislation, the mainstreaming of the fight against racism in Community policies and programs, and the development and exchange of new approaches." In a report due out later this year, the commission will present an overview of measures it has taken to address the issue of racism in candidate countries.

An annex to the communication contains information about international legal instruments that can be used in the fight against racism and xenophobia, along with an overview of the situations in the candidate countries and of EU support there. Also mentioned is the EC's intention of strengthening cooperation with other international organizations—for example, with the Council of Europe in preparing the European input to the United Nations Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, scheduled to be held in 2001.

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, established by the EU in 1997, has as a principal objective "the study of the breadth, the development, causes and consequences of racism, of xenophobia and of anti-Semitism within the Union." In February 1999, the Monitoring Centre and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe signed an agreement that calls for common activities to be carried out within the EU and in the other members of the Council of Europe, including the candidate countries. Following on this agreement, a joint project on the situation of the

Roma has been proposed, which would seek to identify the best examples in Europe of tolerance and successful coexistence.

An EC representative stressed that it is nothing more than a defensive reaction to say that there are only “isolated incidents” in one country or another. There is racism in France, in Britain, and elsewhere. Indeed, racism is an endemic problem of European societies. To say that it does not exist in any particular country means that it is not taken seriously there.

Freedom of circulation of persons within the EU

European policy on the freedom of circulation has two main dimensions: the internal and the external. Internally—that is to say, within the territory embraced by the EU—nationals of any member country have free and unlimited rights to travel in any EU country. They (including their family members) also have the right to work, study, reside, or settle permanently in any EU country.

Externally—that is, in terms of the rights of third-party nationals to enter EU member countries—there is no identifiable, coherent policy. Immigration policy remains essentially a matter of national jurisdiction. Some participants declared that there is a genuine fear among citizens of EU countries that opening the external frontiers would lead to a flood of cheap labor and a consequent loss of jobs, a fear that can be manifested in a kind of racism and xenophobia. This should be brought out into the open now, not when the time comes to ratify treaties of accession.

Attention was drawn to the situation in Slovakia, where increased emigration during the last few years has been met with a re-imposition of visa requirements by some countries, such as Great Britain and Finland. This has sometimes been interpreted as hostility toward the Roma in particular. The Romani participant from Romania emphasized that the Roma emigrate in order to escape discrimination and find a better economic situation.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

Bulgaria

One of the representatives of the Bulgarian government discussed the Framework Program for Equal Participation of the Roma in Bulgarian society, approved in April 1999. This program, in which Romani representatives participate, was built upon a similar program initiated by the

Human Rights Project and approved by Romani organizations. He also mentioned that PER had organized several meetings between the Bulgarian government and Romani organizations and PER also advised the relevant government offices on the subject.

The present program has recommended new state policies in the following areas: (1) protection against discrimination through legal reform and the creation of a special state institution; (2) employment, including training programs, a loan fund, social relief, and land allotment; (3) health care; (4) planning in Romani residential districts; (5) education, including school desegregation; (6) protection of the ethnic specification and culture of the Roma; (7) Romani presence and participation in the mass media; and (8) Romani women.

There is a drive under way to bring everyone in line with policies, including the bureaucracy, but there is a need to train all of those involved with Roma in the area of human rights.

The Roma have now been nominated for offices at several levels of governmental administration, and working groups are being set up. The Bulgarian government has received useful expert legal assistance from PER and the Council of Europe. Roma are participating in projects at all levels.

Last year, the government received 800,000 euros, enabling it to undertake pre-accession programs and legal measures aimed at promoting tolerance. Nonetheless, funding is still inadequate. The Romani representative from Bulgaria said that, while there is now greater mutual understanding and respect, more concrete results are needed. Government officials are unsure of where to find support for future programs.

The Bulgarian government's representative spoke of the importance of having a forum in which people from the Central and East European countries could share their views and exchange experiences, and coordinate activities. There could be more of an institutional framework to provide for regular meetings. Romani issues are neither exclusively national nor exclusively international.

There is ample political support in the prime minister's office, he said. However, there are problems with modernizing the administration at the middle-management level. There is a drive under way to bring everyone

in line with policies, including the bureaucracy, but there is a need to train all of those involved with Roma in the area of human rights.

The Romani representative stated that the Roma have established good relations with both local and national authorities, though only after they had climbed a number of mountains together. At first, there was a wide variety of views among Romani organizations, and the Roma were granted only observer status, but these difficulties have been overcome. Of course, there is still much to be done, such as formulating guidelines and regulations for channeling funds to individual projects.

However, he said, "Our priorities may not be the same as yours." EC support has been mainly for education and training, and the desegregation of schools is important. There are at present schools where nearly 90 percent of the pupils are of Romani backgrounds. The education in those schools is of a lower standard, and until quite recently they had special curricula that gave priority to preparation for manual work. Although there has been legislation in place since 1993 to counter this, such programs still exist. But meanwhile, the Roma are particularly concerned about anti-discrimination measures, because they see discrimination as basic to social and economic problems.

Czech Republic

The government of the Czech Republic, said its representative, has set forth a conceptual framework that seeks to integrate the Roma into the larger society. It is based on the full participation of Roma in society and on closing the social and material gaps between them and the majority, while still allowing Roma to be Roma in terms of culture, history, and language, as far as possible. He listed the twelve elements of this framework:

1. The elimination of all forms of discrimination based on race, nationality, ethnic origin, and color.
2. Equalization of access to education (to be achieved by 2020).
3. Recognition of the individual and group rights of Roma as an ethnic minority.
4. State protection and support of Romani culture and language and their introduction into the general education of all children.
5. Other changes in the educational system, especially with respect to special schools.

6. Involvement of Roma in decision-making concerning affairs of the Romani community.
7. Creation of a network of civil advisory centers offering legal, social, and psychological consultation without charge.
8. Multicultural education and training for all.
9. Training in the nature and problems of racism for judges and other authorities in the criminal-justice system.
10. Research looking toward improvements in the coexistence of different ethnic groups.
11. Support for nonprofit organizations in the area of social and educational programs for Romani children and youth.
12. Changes in social policy that would provide citizens with positive motivations to work.

This conceptual framework, he said, represents part of a new approach that began in 1997, replacing the previous policy, which was characterized by a push for assimilation and the mass emigration of Roma to Canada and other Western countries. One possibly successful instance of the new approach is the recent governmental decree providing for Romani councilors to be appointed by district heads as contact persons and for Romani assistants to be placed in the schools.

The problems facing the Roma are very much European problems, and if not recognized as such, progress will be difficult.

In September 1998, the Interdepartmental Commission for Affairs of the Romani Community was reorganized with twelve, rather than six, Romani representatives, appointed on a geographical basis. In addition, working parties on specific issues can be created, consisting of experts and Romani representatives. However, there has been insufficient funding from the EC and other sources, and there needs to be more cooperation with other countries; for example, there may be much to be learned from Hungarian legislation in the area of national and ethnic minorities.

This representative warned that the Roma should not be treated as a national minority issue in isolation. The problems facing the Roma are very much European problems, and if not recognized as such, progress

will be difficult. The proposed construction of a wall around the Romani settlement in Usti Nad Labem is a clear instance of the dangers and discrimination that face the Roma. There was little criticism of the project at first, and persuading the government to adopt a position was difficult. There needs to be constant international pressure, which is often effective only if linked to economic factors. Central and Eastern Europe is xenophobic and full of racial prejudice. In the Czech Republic, there is a streak of blind nationalism, which must be fought. Education is crucial, beginning at an early age and continuing for the long run.

The Romani representative pointed to the need to educate judges and lawyers who have had no experience with cases of racial discrimination. EC experience with such cases can be instructive. An EC representative responded that it carries out training for judges in EC law in general, but racially motivated crimes are dealt with by the Council of Europe.

The Czech Romani participant also commented on the status of the human rights commissioner, who operates within the Interdepartmental Commission. Because of recent changes, he must now go through the minister for legislative affairs in order to address the government assembly. Many subjects not included in his mandate are nevertheless indirectly connected to human rights. Another handicap is that the Interdepartmental Commission does not have its own budget, and it meets only once every two or three months.

The real problems are being handled by an interministerial committee made up of three persons, of whom one is a Rom. These problems, the ones confronting the ordinary Roma in their everyday lives, are above all housing and employment. "I get reports from the local governments," she added, "and some of them really do care, while others do not. It depends on the region; on the Roma living in the region and on the NGOs that are active there."

The Czech government representative observed that, though he is a minister without portfolio, he has no executive power, no legal footing, and no budget line. "I can speak about Romani-related issues," he said, "but I have only a modest status."

Hungary

The Hungarian government representative declared that the Roma have been the "big losers" in the economic transformation. They have low levels of education and are widely dispersed, and many of them live in

underdeveloped areas. However, there is one positive aspect of the picture in Hungary: its minority self-government system. Of the 1,369 minority self-governments, 759 are Romani. They provide a framework for cooperation between the government and the Romani community at the local level. More than 3,000 Romani representatives take part in the activities of the minority self-governments.

At the national level, the prime minister has had several meetings with Romani leaders. As in the Czech Republic, there is an Interdepartmental Committee on Romani Affairs, chaired by the minister of justice and made up of representatives of the other ministries, the head of the Office for National and Ethnic Minorities, and the president of the National Roma Self-government.

Another setting for cooperation are two new consultative arrangements. In the first of these, twelve Romani artists from different disciplines form a Council for Romani Arts and Culture, and the second, the Roma Civil Forum, has representatives from twelve different Romani organizations. In addition, each ministry has Romani civil servants at both national and local levels. Roma are also members of the boards of the public foundations and they participate in decision-making regarding the special funds of various ministries. Finally, there has been cooperation with the mass media: Roma produce their own radio and television broadcasts, and there are programs for training Romani journalists.

The Romani representative from Hungary said that, in his opinion, the situation had indeed improved: discrimination had diminished, and he believed that racism would also decrease in the near future. He made mention of a joint committee for the implementation of a project, supported by the Interior Ministry, that would lead to the teaching of Romani history in the police academies. There remains a need to work with teachers in the system of public education, and there should be more opportunities for Roma to receive training as teachers. He made reference to the "Ghandi school," in which young Roma can be trained in a setting that reflects the interests of their people.

One other unmet need is that Roma who are active in politics want more information about politics elsewhere in Europe, especially information about Hungary's integration in the EU.

Romania

The governmental representative of Romania spoke of the need to correct the official count of Roma in the country. Many Roma do not identify themselves as such, owing in part to the majority population's perception of Roma as being "inferior," just as in other countries of the region. Romani representation in the parliament is guaranteed by law, but there is a discrepancy between the actual number of Roma in the country and their parliamentary representation.

Issues concerning the Roma and other ethnic and national minorities are dealt with mainly at the central level, through the ministries and the Department for the Protection of National Minorities. A new Interministerial Commission on National Minorities has also been set up, and it includes a subcommission on Roma. These new structures are part of a project, co-financed by the EC Phare program, that calls for the elaboration of a governmental strategy on Roma by the end of the year 2000. Support is needed to mobilize the necessary expertise and equipment for elaborating the strategy. It is important that the process not be left in the shadows, as the situation is an explosive one. The Department for the Protection of National Minorities is short of funds and understaffed (it has only three employees), and once the Phare program is fully implemented, its tasks will increase.

In some recent developments, the Ministry of National Education has appointed a person to be in charge of Romani issues in each county. Funds for minority projects have been tripled, and a more progressive law on education has been adopted. There also appears to be greater government readiness to enact laws against discrimination. Support for anti-discrimination activities is due to end this year, but there is hope that it will be renewed. Particular mention was made of a kind of invisible discrimination against Romani intellectuals, which has not received sufficient attention from the authorities. A research center for national and ethnic minorities would be useful.

The minister added that PER had organized a groundbreaking meeting between the Romanian government and Romani organizations that helped set the debate regarding the governmental policies toward the Roma.

The Romani representative from Romania stated that, in this whole range of activities, the government has had a credible partner in the Working Group of Roma Associations (GLAR), a nonpolitical forum that brings together Romani civic and political organizations and local

leaders of Romani communities. For example, GLAR nominated the Romani members of the subcommission on Roma. GLAR consists of sixteen Roma who serve as negotiators with the Romanian government under a protocol of cooperation signed earlier this year. Its mandate is to promote the interests of Roma; to propose practical methods for the protection of the human and minority rights of Roma; to make proposals for the government's strategy concerning the Roma; to monitor the implementation of the strategy, and to provide a framework for Romani participation in all phases of the strategy.

Slovakia

The present government in Slovakia has been in office for only eight months. Nevertheless, a person responsible for policy toward the Roma has been appointed, the policy is currently being revised (this will be the first year when the policy has had a separate budget line), and a dialogue on the issues has been opened. Two roundtables have been organized on this theme so far.

Currently, three projects are being supported, in the areas of education, housing, and social issues. It is expected that there will be eight or ten projects in the future. The Ministry of Justice, and an independent body related to the Ministry of Culture, are conducting human-rights training activities for public officials.

The Romani participant from Slovakia pointed out that the new office on Romani policy does not have sufficient political power, staff, or funds for dealing with the problems. It is up to the government to end discrimination against Roma in education, housing, and other areas, and to ameliorate their economic difficulties. These are the conditions that contribute to Romani migrations to the West. Roma do not have equal opportunities to participate in the development of the country, and they do not have adequate political representation.

The Romani representative also drew attention to the problems associated with the Romani ghettos. There is a large number of these ghettos, and they are characterized by unemployment, low education levels, health problems, and high crime rates. The government needs a strategy to deal with these problems. Perhaps it could utilize a regional approach, in which some regions would be chosen each year and provided with financial support and expertise for addressing the problems.

A representative from the EC noted that the Phare program has an

important component for social and economic development in selected regions of various countries. It is important for Romani communities to advocate for the inclusion of such regions in the planning document due to be presented in October.

The new Romani experts

One participant called attention to the emergence of Romani experts—often young, but experienced with projects and with managing money. They have made important contributions to the dissemination of new knowledge among Romani communities, and they have become government partners in policy-making. However, there is not yet any mechanism for providing them with training in such a vital area as combating discrimination in administration, health care, and housing.

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In some cases, it seems that the participation of Roma is still only a matter of tokenism. On the other hand, sometimes the Romani activists themselves do not take seriously enough the importance of administrative decision-making,

seeking rather representation in parliament by stressing their national identity or status. There are the usual concerns regarding money, but there is also a need to strive for equality in terms of capabilities within the Romani communities.

Indicators of progress

There was much discussion about the need to monitor and measure the social changes taking place at the level of everyday life. Some of the indicators suggested were the percentage of Romani children attending school, proportions completing high school and university, infant mortality rates, reproduction rates, rates of employment and literacy, and number of prosecutions in racially motivated attacks and cases of discrimination.

One way to proceed would be to create reasonable targets for each of these indicators, and then to ask about each one, what will be the cost of attaining it? Where will the money come from? And is it worthwhile? There also should be a careful analysis of the proportions of the state budget devoted to each purpose.

International cooperation

The adviser on Roma and Sinti issues of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights pointed out that policy-making concerning Roma was on the agenda of OSCE activities this year. They emphasize individual human rights, security-related issues, and combating violence and discrimination. The expert groups of the various international organizations should consider ways of coordinating their efforts.

A representative of the Council of Europe also expressed approval of institutionalizing cooperation among international organizations. Their different roles should be defined, and consideration should be given to how they may work in synergy.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This roundtable was intended in part to encourage dialogue on policy-making between the Roma and the governments of Central and Eastern Europe. But the desire of the CEE countries to join the EU, and the financial support to their governments and NGOs provided by the EC, are important incentives for that dialogue; hence, the EC can be considered a “third partner” in the dialogue, and its representatives were included in the roundtable. Participants were reminded that new elections had recently been held for the European Parliament, which means that new members must be persuaded of the desirability of EU enlargement.

The CEE representatives were cautioned, however, that membership in the EU would not provide simple recipes for solutions to the difficulties confronting their countries. Roma are part of national communities, which are in turn part of the European integration process. It is important that problems resulting from transition and from the surfacing of hidden problems not be exported to the EU. While acknowledging that racism already exists in EU countries, particular reference was made to new forms of xenophobia and racism that might arise out of a genuine fear of a mass influx of cheap labor from CEE countries.

Governments and Romani representatives now have working structures for partnerships, although many of these are in the beginning stages, or have been reorganized. In any case, it is important to consider such aspects as the legal framework for Romani representation, the capacities of the Romani communities, and the requirements for funding and for competent staffing.

Two problems that were repeatedly raised during the roundtable were those related to racism, xenophobia, and discrimination, and those related to the social and economic difficulties confronting the Roma, especially in the more disadvantaged regions of the countries. Governments are developing and implementing programs to address these problems, but it is not always clear how, and for how long, they will be funded. Some opportunities are available within the context of the EC Phare program, and governments are to submit plans for regional social and economic development to the EC in October.

The usefulness of having Roma and government officials exchange information and experiences in an international forum, such as this one, was

acknowledged, and it may be that a more permanent structure should be created for this purpose. Perhaps we can look forward to the emergence of new bilateral and multilateral partnerships and dialogues seeking to identify appropriate strategies and tools for improving the situation of Roma and strengthening democracy in the process of accession to the EU.



From left to right: Klara Orgovanova, Pal Csaky, Livia Plaks, Allen Kassof, Franz Cermak.



From left to right: Peter Eckstein-Kovacs and Viorel Bumbu.

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