

*What is anti-Gypsyism/anti-Tsiganism/Romaphobia?
What is common and different when addressing
racism against Roma, Sinti and Travellers compared
to other forms of racism and intolerance?*



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**Anti-Discrimination Workshop under the Hungarian Presidency of the
Decade for Roma Inclusion, Budapest, 16 April 2008)**

Introduction

On behalf of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe I am pleased to have a possibility to contribute to the opening of this Workshop on Anti-discrimination, as a result of the kind invitation from the Hungarian Presidency of the Roma Decade to associate the Council of Europe with their request addressed to the Decade Trust Fund to hold such a workshop.

As you probably remember, **the fight against discrimination was one of the cross-cutting topics identified among priorities of the Roma Decade**. To some extent it is quite questionable to have had to wait almost three presidencies to address this particular issue, which for me is at the core of the problem, if not the starting point.

Having a clear and common understanding of what is discrimination is a complex issue. The former Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Peter Leuprecht, used to say "*I cannot define poverty but I recognise it when I see it*". I guess the same quote could apply for discrimination).

Going beyond addressing simply discrimination, my introductory speech will aim at providing you with elements of what can be considered as "*anti-Gypsyism*", a specific form of racism.

Background

Although Roma activists have been using this terminology since the 70s and although you might find the terms used in certain reports, such as in EUMAP reports¹, in the early 2000s, **the European Parliament Resolution on the situation of Roma in the European Union adopted on 28 April 2005 is to my knowledge the first official text to speak quite extensively of «Anti-Gypsyism/Romaphobia»** in its preamble and decisions:

¹ EUMAP 2002 report published by Open Society Institute on the Situation of Roma in Germany.

*C. underlining the importance of urgently eliminating continuing and violent trends of racism and racial discrimination against Roma, and conscious that any form of impunity for racist attacks, hate speech, physical attacks by extremist groups, unlawful evictions and police harassment motivated by **Anti-Gypsyism and Romaphobia** plays a role in weakening the rule of law and democracy, tends to encourage the recurrence of such crimes and requires resolute action for its eradication,*

*R. having regard to the difficulties faced by the Roma population in having their culture fully acknowledged, and deploring the fact that in most Member States and candidate countries the mainstream media continue to under-represent Roma in their programming while simultaneously reinforcing a negative stereotype of Roma citizens through news items and television and radio shows; noting that new communication technologies, including the internet, can also help to combat **Romaphobia**,*

*3. Welcomes the recent declaration by Commission President Barroso regarding the importance of eliminating discrimination against Roma people and the role which the Lisbon Strategy could play in improving opportunities for Roma, and urges the Council, Commission, Member States and candidate countries publicly to take steps to combat **Anti-Gypsyism/Romaphobia** in all forms, be it at local, national, regional or EU level;*

*4. Urges the Commission to include the issue of combating **Anti-Gypsyism/Romaphobia** across Europe among its priorities for the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, and calls on political parties and civil society at all levels to make it clear that racial hatred against Roma can never be tolerated in European society;*

*8. Calls upon Member States and candidate countries to strengthen national legislation and administrative measures that expressly and specifically counter **Anti-Gypsyism/Romaphobia** and prohibit racial discrimination and related intolerance, whether direct or indirect, in all spheres of public life;*

*25. Urges the EUMC and, upon its creation, the Fundamental Rights Agency to devote more attention to **Anti-Gypsyism/Romaphobia** in Europe and to allocate the necessary resources to monitor racial abuse and human rights violations against Roma;*

This terminology can also be found in subsequent European Parliament Resolutions, such as **the EP Resolution on the situation of Roma women in the European Union adopted on 1 June 2006:**

*22. Urges the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia to initiate a series of studies on the role of the media in fostering **anti-gypsyism**, and in particular on the promotion of damaging stereotypes of Romani women;*

or **the EP Resolution on a European strategy on the Roma adopted on 31 January 2008:**

*L. Whereas **Anti-Gypsyism or Romaphobia** is still widespread in Europe and is promoted and used by extremists, which can culminate to the expression of racist attacks, hate speeches, physical attacks unlawful evictions and police harassment;*

*4. Urges the new European Union Fundamental Rights Agency to place **anti-Gypsyism** among its highest priorities in its work program;*

The international OSCE/EU/CoE conferences on Roma, Sinti and Travellers in Warsaw (October 2005) and Bucharest (May 2006) confirmed use of the term «anti-Gypsyism» at international level. The Bucharest Conference in particular devoted a whole session on this issue (Anti-Gypsyism as a phenomenon throughout Europe) chaired by Anastasia Crickley and with speakers including Valeriu Nicolae (ERIO) on Anti-Gypsyism in the media, Asmet Elezovski about the conclusions from a Conference on Anti-Ziganism organised in Hamburg by the *Europäisches Zentrum für Antiziganismus Forschung*, Isil Gachet from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance- (ECRI), and Lauri Sivonen from the Office of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. In the conclusions of this Conference **there was a call for the recognition of anti-Gypsyism as a specific form of racism.**

A positive response to this call was recently given **at the level of the Council of Europe with Recommendation Rec(2008)5 on policies for Roma and/or Travellers in Europe adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 February 2008**, which states in its preamble:

Recognising the existence of anti-Gypsyism as a specific form of racism and intolerance, leading to hostile acts ranging from exclusion to violence against Roma and/or Traveller communities;

Part IV. "Legislative framework" of this Recommendation says:

As anti-Gypsyism and violence against Roma and/or Travellers is widespread in Europe, member states that have not yet done so should make racial motivation an aggravating circumstance in prosecuting criminal offences, and ensure that such offences include racially motivated crimes against Roma and/or Travellers.

This terminology is now being used by high officials of the Council of Europe, and in particular quite extensively by the Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Thomas Hammarberg. To quote just an extract of his last press release *"The key to the promotion of Roma rights: early and inclusive education"*:

While Antiziganism is a threat to all efforts to ensure the Roma of their rights, several existing and acute social problems are interlinked.

Debate about the terminology

The report of the aforementioned Bucharest Conference shows that it is not an easy task to come up with a common wording.

The Council of Europe glossary on Roma-related terminology says the following:

Since around 2005, explicit references to "anti-Gypsyism", "anti-tsiganism" or "Romaphobia" as a specific form of racism have become increasingly common at international level. This often comes out as «anti-Gypsyism» in English, although many continental Roma prefer «Anti-Tsiganism» or «Anti-Ziganism», which is closer to the local derivatives (e.g. «Antiziganismus» in German).

«Romaphobia» means the same thing as «Anti-Gypsyism». Fearing that careless journalists may start giving us «Romaniaphobia» instead, we prefer to use the terms «antitsiganisme / anti-Gypsyism» at the Council of Europe.

If anyone objects that we are straying close to «Gypsy» and «Tsigane», and that these should not be used, our answer is that these are indeed – and must remain – terms with negative connotations, which are in any case aimed, not at Roma, but at the majority, and so must be instantly clear to non-Roma («antitsiganisme» has echoes of «anti-Semitism» and so connects quickly with the concept of racism, though we must be careful not to over-simplify and lump things together).

Marko Knudsen from the *Europäisches Zentrum für Antiziganismus Forschung*, wrote in the conclusions of the II. International Antiziganism Conference:

Antiziganism or Antigypsyism

The European Center for Antiziganism Research will use the term Antiziganism in its international, English-language work, thus refraining from the term Antigypsyism. We decided against the commonly used English term, because it only refers to the Roma (“Gypsies”) in English-speaking territories like Great Britain and Ireland, while the rest of Europe uses closely related terms like “Zigeuner”, “Cigan”, “Cingany”, “Tsigange” etc.

Thus, the linguistic root “Zigan-“ is better suited for usage in a terminological definition for the entirety of Europe, the term “Antiziganism” allowing an identification of the problem on a national as well as international level. For example, a Rumanian might not make a direct connection between the word “Antigypsyism” and the “Tsigans” in his homeland.

The term “Antigypsyism” therefore only makes sense in the context of the special, national Antiziganism in the English-speaking territories of Europe.

I guess we can conclude that the same way the words “astronaut”, “cosmonaut”, “spationaut” and “taikonaut” are all synonymous, the same way “Anti-Gypsyism”, “Anti-Tsiganism” or “Romaphobia” correspond to the same reality.

Definition

The *Europäisches Zentrum für Antiziganismus Forschung* proposes the following definition:

Antiziganism has to be understood as an instrument of stigmatisation, whose intent is not to observe and understand the circumstances of the “other” side, but to find elements of identification that legitimate separation and other discriminative actions against those “others”. Antiziganism is uttered freely and unfiltered by the majority society.

Thus, it hardly matters if a community of “Gypsies” has been living nearby for decades – their neighbours still consider them “Nomads”. 657 years ago, the Roma entered the continent together with the Turks during the Osman Empire’s invasion of Europe. This is probably the reason why they were initially feared and distrusted – a notion that remained in the European consciousness and has been nourished until our present day,

Valeriu Nicolae also proposed some sort of definition:

Anti-Gypsyism means the total of resentments focused on Roma, and based on various racist, social or other motives. Because of that anti-Gypsyism is part of a social phenomenon that includes stereotypes as well as their political instrumentation. The enmity against Roma needs specific images of the Gypsy; those images have been produced and reproduced in all European societies for centuries. Meanwhile, the images of the Gypsy function as fixed codes (as signals for a political position that enables definitions of the 'stranger' and the 'native') – and are easily evoked from both the individual and the collective memory at any time. Research on anti-Gypsyism wants to identify these images and indicate their functions.

Anti-Gypsyism is not just another type of racial discrimination. It is, at the same time similar, different and intertwined with racism.

Anti-gypsyism is a specific form of racism, an ideology of racial superiority, a form of dehumanisation and of institutional racism [...] fuelled by historical discrimination.

In the Warsaw Conference, Valeriu Nicolae underlined that there were *"only a few studies on the dimension and function of anti-Gypsyism available. At the same time opinion polls in all countries in West and East Europe prove the potential of anti-Gypsyism : in all the countries rejection of Roma by the majority is extremely high."* Joachim Ott from DG Employment, European Commission, was sharing the day before yesterday at a meeting organised by the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) the results of a poll made in 2007 by Eurobarometer with 25,000 interviewees from the EU area: 77% consider that belonging to the Roma ethnic group is a disadvantage. A similar poll made in 2008 shows that 24% of EU citizens would not like to have Roma as neighbours (47% in the Czech Republic and Italy). These last figures seemed to be underestimated from the point of Roma present.

The scandal of this extremely high negative attitude against Roma in all European societies becomes clear when being compared to other minority groups. While the social and political debate on all forms of anti-Semitism and xenophobia relays on a variety of instruments, beginning with education up to advocacy with political and social representatives as well as legal restrictions, anti-Gypsyism remains almost a normal thing to which no attention needs to be drawn. The lack of an adequate term describing the resentments against Roma for many decades is one indicator.

Isil Gachet, Executive Secretary of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) made for the Warsaw Conference an interesting analysis about ***what is common and different when addressing racism against Roma, Sinti and Travellers compared to other forms of racism and intolerance.***

As you probably all know, within the Council of Europe, ECRI is tasked with combating racism and racial discrimination. It takes a "rights-based" approach to its work and undertakes activities aimed at ensuring that the right to freedom from discrimination is enjoyed by all persons present on the territory of Council of Europe member States. ECRI works to prevent violence, discrimination and prejudice faced by persons and groups of persons on grounds of race, colour, language, religion, nationality and national or ethnic origin.

"If we consider that ECRI's field of action covers all groups which are vulnerable to racism in Europe, then it is evident, when looking at these figures, that Roma do indeed constitute a group which is particularly and specifically vulnerable. In fact, they are a target-group for racism, and one which is in a way ECRI's "most frequent customer" and which is in the most preoccupying situation. It is most often when dealing with Roma communities that ECRI uses the words "exclusion" and "segregation" to describe a situation in a given country. Of course, part of this exclusion, and only part of it, can be explained by the severe socio-economic disadvantage from which Roma communities suffer. But there are obviously other aspects to analyse and deal with in the behaviour of mainstream society in order to put an end to this exclusion and segregation.

On the basis of facts gathered from ECRI's country-specific reports, we can say that:

- In our societies, Roma do not enjoy the equal dignity which is the right of all human beings*
- Along with discrimination, they are also the target of racist violence*
- The intolerance they face is not decreasing.*

ECRI addresses this situation in its **General Policy Recommendation N° 3**, which deals specifically with **the fight against racism and intolerance towards Roma**. In the preamble of this Recommendation, ECRI states clearly that *"Roma suffer throughout Europe from persisting prejudices, are victims of a racism which is deeply-rooted in society, are the target of sometimes violent demonstrations of racism and intolerance and their fundamental rights are regularly violated and threatened."*

If we want to combat racism against Roma effectively, we first have to grasp the specificities of this racism. Certain elements of the phrase in the preamble give us some leads to follow.

*First of all, the notion of the **persistence of prejudice**: We are faced with a situation of **permanent racism** - both from a historical and geographical point of view; a racism which has endured over the centuries without waning, and which spreads from East to West and North to South.*

*Next, the notion of **systemisation**: This is a systematic, regular, repetitive racism; to the point where it almost seems to indicate a sort of **"acceptance of that kind of racism"** within society.*

*And, another element is the **violent nature of manifestations of racism towards Roma**. It is a racism commonly put in practice.*

*We could ask ourselves if the **notion of impunity in the minds of perpetrators** is not in some way responsible for facilitating here and there the carrying out of racist acts. Here we can refer to numerous examples of racist statements or use of violence*

that were never condemned by politicians at state or local levels. Sometimes the politicians themselves are the perpetrators or take the defence of those who do racist attacks or have racist statements (see the article published by Mr. Henry Scicluna, Council of Europe Coordinator for Roma Issues in a recent issue of "Roma Rights", the quarterly journal of the ERRC).

To this already clear list of elements for a definition provided by ECRI, I would like to add the following aspects, which seem to me particularly relevant when referring to anti-Gypsyism:

There is a **generalisation** – "all Roma are alike" which could be common I guess to other groups who are victims of racism. However, what is specific with Roma is the **common punishment**. Whenever a Roma individual commits a crime (they are neither better nor worse than the rest of society and other ethnic groups), it is quite common that the whole community is being punished. The Italian example of last year and the reaction by politicians, by the majority population and the media, is an illustration. The same applies in France when police forces are coming very early in the morning to encampment sites, often violently getting all the families out of the caravans, sometimes destroy their property, just to look for one individual. Could we imagine this in any neighbourhood where the majority population is living, to have police officers knocking at each door, pushing families into the street and destroying apartments just to look after a potential criminal?

Another aspect is a certain **hypocrisy** when addressing the issue and often a **blame put on the victims of discrimination**. Roma are accused of not sending their children to school, of encouraging their children to drop out of school at an early age. Surely such things are happening, and for various reasons. What I always found particularly annoying and hypocritical is when the same authorities which blame Roma for not sending their children to school are forcibly evicting Roma families whose children were attending school, when these authorities support segregation or the enrolment in schools for mentally disabled, or when they support parents who are protesting that their children are sitting next to Roma kids. I also found hypocritical in a number of occasions when authorities hide behind data protection legislation not to undertake studies or provide useful information that would help improving policies for Roma while at the same time innocently come up with data for instance about Roma criminality. A last example could also be the criticism that Roma organisations are in conflict between them, which prevents any kind of consultation with them. If this argument has been valid for a long time, it is often not true anymore since Roma networks or umbrella organisations were established at national level and the European Roma and Travellers Forum was created at the European level. Even when these structures exist, excuses are found not to consult them. I am glad that after a very long time the ERTF, which had received the status of international partner in the Terms of Reference of the Roma Decade, was invited to a Roma Decade meeting, through its Secretariat represented by Robert Rustem, by the Hungarian presidency and the Roma Decade Secretariat.

In conclusion, quoting once more Isil Gachet, *it is not enough to analyse manifestations of racism and intolerance. ECRI is well aware that the analysis is not an end in itself but a necessary step in the process which consists in offering practical and reliable solutions to combat these phenomena.*

Recognising that anti-Gypsyism exists as a specific form of racism is a first step. Isil Gachet was calling participants from Warsaw to *"not deny the problem: it is fundamental to take the first step, the one which some of our partners have yet to take, that is to acknowledge the problem. It must be stated loud and clear: yes, it is racism which is at the root of the violence perpetrated against Roma, and at the root of the violations of their basic rights. On this subject, institutions such as CoE, OSCE-ODIHR and FRA have a fundamental role to play and should firmly carry this message together."*

A second aspect is to name the problem. This is why the Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers (MG-S-ROM) has decided to send a letter to ECRI to suggest to them to update their General Policy Recommendation no. 3 and have it focused on *"Anti-Gypsyism"*. A similar proposal came from the Roma Women's networks in their Declaration following the Stockholm conference organised by the Swedish authorities, Council of Europe and FRA last December.

A third aspect is to widely address the issue. The Council of Europe also came up to the conclusion that it should reinforce its action on fighting anti-Gypsyism by confronting the majority population, and in particular local authorities, school institutions and journalists, with their own prejudice and stereotypes towards Roma. My colleague Ivana d'Alessandro will present you more in detail the Dosta! campaign launched in some of our member states, and which hopefully have a long-term impact on some of our European fellow-citizens.

And finally a general condition is to have the support of the Roma community: anti-Gypsyism, prejudice and stereotypes towards Roma, as they touch also upon traditions and culture (*Romanipen*) cannot be addressed if the Roma community itself is not supportive or if Roma do not feel part of it. At the Warsaw Conference in 2005 there was a fear expressed by some Roma representatives that having an awareness-raising campaign would have as a side effect the reinforcement of anti-Gypsyism. This is certainly an issue I would like to discuss, among many others, with you during this workshop.

Thank you for your attention.