

Antiziganism

A European consensus

By Rudko Kawczynski, February 2014

Over 12 million Roma currently live in Europe, the majority in the countries of the former Eastern bloc. The ongoing break-up of nations into ethnicity-based states leads irrevocably to the isolation of Roma as outside the ethnic majority, and often deprives them of their citizenship. Ex-Yugoslavia, ex-Czechoslovakia and the former USSR are but a few examples of places where the status of Roma is unstable. Despite constitutions assuring citizenship to all, these states are created around an ethno-national character and the public very predictably perceives belonging to these states as being

tied to ethnicity. Being foreign in their own land is a situation Roma experience over and over again.

Violence against Roma, marginalisation in all sectors of society, inadequate and unequal education opportunities, illiteracy, high child mortality rates, discrimination and unemployment: these do not cause the problems, rather they are the symptoms of the majority's obsessive Antigypsism, or Anticiganism; its discriminatory attitude towards Roma.

Antigypsism and prejudices

Antigypsism is a basic social consensus in European societies: whoever makes a serious effort to explain this phenomenon has to first describe the world-view of the majority population. In regard to so-called Gypsies, this means describing the origins of prejudices and their transmission from generation to generation. This is a difficult undertaking, because prejudices are fundamentally at

odds with rational thought. Every attempt to discuss them rationally or objectively brings with it the unavoidable danger that these prejudices will manifest themselves in the very discussion. For example, does "Gypsy" fortune-telling belong to their culture or is it a means by which they can profit **financially from the prejudices of the majority? Do Roma migrate because they enjoy it and feel 'free' when uprooted or because they need safety? There is an ingrained belief among the majority that Roma like to wander, just as there was for many centuries in Europe a stereotype of the 'wandering and begging Jew' which seems absurd today. Do Roma, then, like to migrate? Any answer to this question will undoubtedly reveal more about the cultural background of the respondent than about "Gypsy" culture. Many "Gypsy" stereotypes may seem absurd but they are nonetheless an indelible feature of European culture.**

They help explain things and aid our intellectual orientation like a kind of map. People stand by them as if they were an article of faith, an indisputable dogma. That they function as norms and obvious truths goes unquestioned in the same way that other basic social tenants, i.e. the value placed on liberty or a sovereign state's right to defend itself, go unquestioned. Though history is full of ex-

amples of absurd assumptions being at the foundations of a society's world-view, many people, especially forward-thinking people, think that such conditions surely can't be dominant in this day and age. If most are prepared to accept that some tribes believe in evil spirits, that Jews were in the Middle Ages held to be servants of the devil, that the Spanish Inquisition burned witches, that German Nazis gassed children, why is it so hard to believe that prejudices and stereotyping manifest themselves in the form of Antigypsism?

Because Antigypsism is so deeply rooted in western culture, it is those who are at the receiving end who must set about proving its existence. It becomes clear what magnitude of problems face the person who tries to explain Antigypsism or influence social convictions, and they meet with defensive and hostile reactions when "everyday truths" are questioned.

According to a survey, every fifth person in Europe has anti-Semitic views; two thirds of the populations are hostile to Roma. There are many similarities between anti-Semitism and Antigypsism, not the least the interchangeable bias about "thieving Gypsies" and "rapacious Jews" which not only

crops up in casual conversations in Paris, London or Berlin but have their historical origins in medieval edicts. Martin Luther, a well-known anti-Semite, exhorted Christians to treat Jews *"like Gypsies"*.

Antigypsism has, unlike anti-Semitism, never been questioned and therefore still remains part of the *"cultural codex"* of the majority population.

Prejudices reveal a lot about Antigypsism but nothing about so-called *"Gypsies"*. Suggestions for solutions and strategies can tell us a lot about prejudices and Antigypsism, or about those who came up with them. Someone who is utterly unsympathetic to Roma, an Antiziganist, will cast the very *"Gypsy-ness"* of the Roma as responsible for problems; a teacher sympathetic to Roma will blame their *"inadequate"* education.

A basic feature of Antigypsism is the manner in which Roma are reduced to their supposed *"Gypsiness"*. Roma are not seen as individuals, as personalities or as involved and engaged, but

as "Gypsies": this label becomes the deciding characteristic in how they are perceived – instead of perceiving them as compatriots with the same rights, they become "Gypsies" with all the stereotypes and "related characteristics".

The omnipresence of Antigypsism extends, unfortunately, even to those well disposed towards Roma.

Well-meaning liberals in the 18th century maintained that the Jews' future lay in their own "political and moral" rebirth, renewal, by which these liberals meant that Jews should make use of the potential offered by education as outlined in their wide-ranging schemes for "improvement". In a similar manner, well-meaning supporters have for centuries trying to "civilize" "the Gypsy" through "education".

Christian Wilhelm Dohms,– expressend this theory in his 1781 published book

„Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden“

"If the repression which he (the Jew) has suffered has made his habits crude, so fair treatment will improve him" ¹

If we take stock of present situations, certain patterns of explanation become evident, which have so far been overlooked. If we take the problem as a whole, we can begin to analyze it in terms of Antigypsism and we come to a new and realistic understanding in our search for a solution.

Problems

The main feature of the Roma's history in Europe has always been their continuous persecution and expulsion. In Germany, Croatia and Czechoslovakia, this policy of "fighting the gypsy problem" developed into genocide in the National Socialism. This inhuman, horrible escalation by the national-socialist way of "solving the gypsy question" was silently disregarded after the Second World

¹ (Christian Wilhelm Dohms, 1781 – *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*).

War. The state mostly continued the special treatment of the survivors to solve the supposed “gypsy problem” this way.

Traditionally, the Roma are regarded by Western societies as a social problem, which is to be taken care of by state repression and “education”. Roma are not accepted as a minority according to international law. Until now, This discriminating point of view usually led to problem solutions concentrating on treating the Roma as a “social fringe group problem”². But the situation of the Roma in Europe has unambiguously shown that the problems of the Roma originate in the Antigypsism of the majority.

A real intention to increase the living conditions of the Roma is not in sight, if not the opposite. Since the former East bloc came down, the situation of the Roma is continuously getting worse and has even exaggerated with the enlargement of the European Union.

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¹Dr. Yaron Matras, CDMG Report “*Problems arising in connection with the international mobility of the roma in Europe*” 1998

Discrimination, ethnic cleansings, hate speeches in western medias and violence against Roma are put down to their “habits”. Victims are made perpetrators; the behavior of the majority appears to be some kind of self-defense.

In spite of millions of financial aid to states of the former East bloc, discrimination, violence and expulsion against Roma rise in these countries. There seems to be a direct causality between “aid programs” and migration of Roma. Those states, which received the greatest financial aids, are paradoxically, also those from which the most asylum-seeking Roma come from. In the meantime, systematical exclusion, unemployment, discrimination and terror by the police have become part of the everyday life for Roma in the states of the former East bloc, as well as murder, arson attacks and expulsion.

In the meantime, more than one million Roma in Europe were expelled from their homes. Many have fled from discrimination and violence.

The situation of the Roma in former Yugoslavia, the Kosovo and in the Czech Republic has proven to be especially dangerous. At the same time, the receiving states react with growing helplessness and aggressions against Roma refugees and refuse them protection.

In place of fighting the causes of refuge has moved the fighting of the victims – the refugee³. In place of partnership and participation came neo-colonialism and manipulation.

Specifically in the Czech Republic and Hungary exists the tendency to suppress and manipulate the independent Roma movement. The Roma civil rights movement is systematically persecuted and politically suppressed. Civil rights campaigners are criminalized and their families put under pressure⁴.

These tendencies are even increased by the attitude of some Western countries (especially Germany, England and Belgium) that on the one hand play down and hush up the reasons for escape, on

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Prof. Dr. Klaus J. Bade; „*Europa in Bewegung: Migration vom späten 18. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart*“ Munich August 2000

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RNN Reports on Czech Republic and Hungary and the Case of the Family of Ondrej Gina

the other hand put pressure on the originating countries to make the escape impossible for Roma. For example; the FYROM government has established ethnic profiling on their border to thwart the escape of Roma.

Roma as Refugees

Since centuries the Roma have become the synonyms for persecuted people in Europe. Roma asylum-seekers and refugees are set out to a principal suspect of “criminality”. Although all serious international institutions unanimously confirm the persecution of the Roma, the responsible national authorities ignore these facts.

By declaring its neighbors "secure third states", while at the same time refusing international cooperation on support for refugees and on eliminating human rights violation, Germany has provoked a chain reaction across Europe: No state can allow itself to confront the problems of the Romani refugees constructively, for fear of carrying the burden of granting protection and security alone. Thus,

European governments have followed the model introduced by Germany with each of the parties and have signed bilateral treaties among themselves, aiming to restrict the movement of potential Roma refugees.

Often, the Roma refugees are given characteristics which were put on the Eastern Jews during the time of the Nazis⁵: - “That they would mainly nourish themselves by small-time criminality, that they would not care much about hygiene, that they would be a potential source for epidemics, that they would make whole quarters uninhabitable,” and the like.

The German historian Professor Dr. Klaus J. Bade describes the treatment of Roma refugees in his newest book “Europe in motion: Migration from the late 18th century till present time” as follows⁶:

Citation start:

⁵ Interview Kurt Holl „Junge Welt“ (Berlin) August 2000

⁶ Verlag C.H.Beck, München August 2000.

“ (...) in partly latent, partly openly racist descriptions `the gypsies` became the asocial counterpart to the orderly common world. Threats of physical violence against the migrants from the East alarmed the security interests.

(...) for the unwanted immigration of `gypsies` from Eastern Europe the opposite was true [as for the Jews] – exclusion and repatriation. What had been enough for the collective acknowledgement of Jews from the Union of Independent States as contingent refugees in Germany, should not be valid for `gypsies`. It could not even be enforced by political pressure, as powerful support in the West was missing.Socialist violent crimes did not help the `gypsies` from South-Eastern Europe as refugees or asylum-seekers in Germany, either. (...) They were living in collective tent camps between expulsion, deportation threats and deportation stops. Meanwhile, hectic treaty negotiations with East European origin and transit countries took place. Their first outcome was the German-Rumanian “repatriation settlement” of November 1992. It was followed by similar agreements with other East and South-East European countries, usually connected with millions of subsidies for

the “repatriation”. The chain of migrations from East to West, stopped by defensive measures of the “fortress Europe”, was replaced by a chain of deportations from West to East: Roma who were expelled or picked up close to the border got deported to their origin countries, where they again became victims of enraged nationalists now and then. What remained for the Roma from East or South-East Europe heading for the West was the illegal immigration, steadily growing with the increasing closure of the “fortress Europe”. That also hold true recently for the Roma in Kosovo, who were expelled as alleged “collaborators” of the Serbs by the returning Albanians after the war had ended.

The “fortress Europe” shall expand to the East. It will have to prepare itself that in Eastern Europe it is not only about – rather controllable – employment migrations. In the long term, a precarious overlapping of employment-, minority- and escape migrations will also always be a topic, which will not be “manageable” solely by regional economic promotion.”

Citation End !

Anti-Gypsism or Economic Problem

It is a short-sighted and dangerous behavior of numerous Western countries to classify the Antigypsyist tendencies of the Eastern European states as economical problems and reward them with generous financial programs, at the same time ignoring that Antigypsism is a solid part of these cultures since centuries, a kind of cultural codex, similar only to anti-Semitism⁷.

This financial bearing of the European Union has brought a regular contribution to the rehabilitation of the treasury of numerous countries, at the expense of human rights. It certainly did not contribute to the battle against racism and Antigypsism in Europe.

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Prof. Wolfgang Wippermann; „Wie die Zigeuner“ Berlin-Elefanten-Press-Verlag

Although the EU supports “Roma projects” with millions of EURO, almost non of these aids reaches the affected persons’

Millions of EURO disappear year after year in the pockets of “gypsy helpers” and so-called “good practices” programs. Instead of fighting discrimination and violence, - programs are financed that degrade the victims to objects of a care-taking industry, which fights the Roma as a problem, and not the problems faced by the Roma.

These are strategies which already failed decades ago in the so-called “Third World”, and which led to corruption and dictatorships, but not to the stabilization of civil and human rights.

In spite of all these “aids”, new ethnically clean ghettos are continually created, in which Roma are forced to live.

Roma are expelled by the likes of the countries, or displaced by force.

Unnoticed by the majority of Europeans, the greatest ethnocide in recent history is taking place.

An unutterable vicious circle of arrogance, prejudices and unprofessionalism is leading to a continuously new generation of well-loved programs and research assignments, which again and again are missing the needs of the people. These projects are part of the problem and certainly not part of the solution.

Current Problems of the Roma

Centuries of discrimination have deprived the Roma of the educational and vocational opportunities and so of the social and economic benefits of modern societies.

The most urgent problem facing the Roma today is, however, mere survival in a society which has always felt free to treat them as scapegoats, to marginalize them by preventing access to jobs, qualified education, housing, and other necessities, to incite and to use violence against them.

Antigypsism and human rights violations against Roma are generally not sanctioned in Europe. This concerns especially the newly established political systems in eastern Europe. But also western governments have failed to guarantee the Roma the special protection against Antigypsism and discrimination, which their situation demands. A full catalogue of human rights violations against Roma cannot be provided here; a number of reports by human rights agencies have dealt with specific measures and incident.

Facing historic responsibility: Germany's role in preventing an improvement of the human rights situation of Roma

More than any other country, Germany incorporates the continuity of the persecution of the Romani people through history.

Germany has a special role in coordinating Romani East-West migrations, characterised by two main factors;

Since reunification, it has begun to redefine its political role in both domestic and international affairs, often using foreign policy as an instrument for securing public support on the short-term domestic political front. Fighting immigration and immigrants has proven to be such an issue, with the Roma as the traditional scapegoat on the top of the list of unwanted foreigners "flooding" Germany.

The unique quality of Germany's active measures are recognizable in its efforts to tie economic aid to restrictions on migrations: Germany has signed treaties with a number of south-eastern European governments, allowing indiscriminate deportation of refugees to the partner countries. The partners are expected to prevent potential refugees from leaving or crossing their territory.

Thus, Germany has succeeded in establishing a precedence for using western economic aid as a tool for restricting freedom of movement, rather than controlling the protection of human rights. By doing so, it not only fails to assume responsibility towards minority rights in a changing eastern European society, but it also encourages restrictions imposed on minorities.

By declaring its neighbors "secure states", while at the same time refusing international cooperation on support for refugees and on eliminating human rights violation, Germany has provoked a chain reaction across Europe: No state can allow itself to confront the problems of the Romani refugees constructively, for fear of carrying the burden of granting protection and security alone. Thus, European governments have followed the model introduced by Germany with each of the parties and have signed bilateral treaties among themselves, aiming to restrict the movement of potential refugees.

Summary

Traditional policies directed at the Roma have failed. Those who have suffered most through this failure are the Roma themselves: While the process of European unification is advancing, the human rights standard for Roma has been deteriorating. This paradox development can only be resolved by regulating a firm legal status for the Roma in Europe.

Across Europe, national governments fear an overt discussion on the status of the Roma. In many countries, the racism/nationalism-discussion has encouraged the growth of radical right-wing movements and an increase in racist violence. Administrations therefore fear that concrete measures against Antiziganism may cost them loss of popularity and electoral power. National policies have thus concentrated lately on increasing restrictions, rather than enabling political participation. Moreover, even occasional measures aiming at an improvement of the civil liberty's situation of the Roma are subject to short-term political considerations.

European Charter on Romani Rights

The Romani civil rights movement has succeeded in forwarding a number of international resolutions and recommendations, many of which have been adopted by multilateral organizations. However, resolutions and recommendations need to be implemented. Those adopted by the multilateral organizations are usually not binding; they may be ignored by government executives as well as by national legislation, and usually they are. If improvements are to be made in pursuit of protection of Romani human rights, a binding European Charter on Romani Rights needs to be drafted and ratified by the legislatures of European states, this would enable Roma and their representatives to use all legal means to assure the implementation of measures.

A process of rethinking is required

Without the respect of the Roma as a people, as subjects of the international law and as partners, there cannot be a normal coexistence of the Roma and the majority.

In the 21st-century Europe, the treatment of Roma will be the most important factor in gauging human rights conditions and the treatment of minorities. A united, democratic Europe, which respects the rights of minorities inevitably, presupposes respect for Roma and their claim to equal rights. Without the Roma's inclusion and participation in democratic process there can be no peaceful, normal relationship between Roma and the majority population.

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