

## 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.

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Individuals and institutions wishing to receive PER publications should write to:

**PROJECT ON  
ETHNIC  
RELATIONS**



15 Chambers Street  
Princeton, New Jersey 08542-3707, USA  
Telephone: (609) 683-5666  
Fax: (609) 683-5888  
E-mail: [per@per-usa.org](mailto:per@per-usa.org)  
Web Site: [www.per-usa.org](http://www.per-usa.org)

R e p o r t

MARCH 9-10, 2001



KRAKOW, POLAND

**LEADERSHIP,  
REPRESENTATION AND  
THE STATUS OF THE ROMA**

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## PREFACE

Who speaks for the Roma?

The Romani community has been recognized as a legitimate ethnic minority only in the past decade. It had had virtually no political elite; its leaders were “traditional,” with little formal education and only limited interest in political engagement. At the same time, the new leadership that has recently begun to emerge brings little direct political experience. One result is that the Romani community has been constantly subjected to the paternalism of majority politicians.

The Project on Ethnic Relations has been involved for the last decade in helping to identify and to prepare a modern Romani elite to be an independent force in the interethnic dialogue about the Romani communities of Central and Southeastern Europe. PER has encouraged young Romani leaders to take responsibility in representing, debating, and negotiating Romani interests with the majority. However, the number of new leaders who are interested in politics is still very small, while those who are involved often lack political skills. These young leaders, products of the ongoing democratization processes taking place in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, are still in search of an articulated political identity.

It is difficult for the Roma to find definitive examples in the experiences of other ethnic minorities. These minorities typically benefit from longer political experience and better organization, and sometimes enjoy



**Participants in the Krakow seminar. Left to right: (back row) Adam Andrasz, Dragoljub Ackovic, Petar Antic, Nadezhda Demeter, Emil Scuka, Klara Orgovanova, Vilmos Kovesi, Rudko Kawczynski, Andrzej Mirga, Nicolae Gheorghe, Ivan Vesely; (front row) Salome Hirvaskoski, Gheorghe Raducanu, Ondrej Gina.**

support from a “mother country.” Moreover, other minority communities generally do not suffer from the extreme discrimination and poverty that reduce the Roma’s capacity for political participation. Nor can their outlook provide a clear answer to the question of whether the Roma should proceed on “ethnic” or “civic” principles in asserting their claims, since other minorities themselves are sometimes divided on this issue.

The Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) and its Romani Advisory Council (PERRAC) organized a seminar on “Romani Representation and Leadership at National and International Levels” in Krakow, Poland, on March 9-10, 2001. The seminar gathered a group of senior Romani leaders and representatives of Romani parties and Romani NGOs from Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe to debate and discuss the most important questions that the Romani elite now faces.

The discussion in Krakow centered on the meaning of legitimacy, traditional versus modern and democratic leadership; the quality of leaders’ performances; positive and negative examples of representation; and the role that leaders should play. Some participants criticized the limited interaction between modern Romani leaders and their communities, and emphasized the importance of regular consultations with constituencies. The participants also extensively discussed the experiences of Romani nongovernmental organizations as well as Romani political parties, their development over the last decade, and their different roles and responsibilities. The Romani leadership now faces the challenge of how to observe democratic rules and procedures, devise stable organizational structures, and enhance the quality of its own performance.

The participants also discussed the issue of Romani political participation, which is of great importance to international organizations, governments, political, and civic organizations as well as to Romani leaders. International organizations, wishing to encourage the Roma to participate in society and in politics and to include the Roma in decision-making processes, need legitimate and responsible partners in the Romani community.

The future political status of the Roma was another major topic of the Krakow seminar. Participants examined two trends: the formal recognition of the Roma as minorities within their respective states, already achieved in many countries; and aspirations of some Roma to self-determination, that is, recognition of the Roma as a non-territorial nation.

The pros and cons of these opposing orientations were considered, as was their impact on the construction of a Romani identity, representation, and the evolution of political strategies and programs. As was to be expected, there was considerable debate and disagreement about these topics.

This report was written by Andrzej Mirga, chair of the PER Romani Advisory Council and co-chair of the Council of Europe Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies and was edited by PER staff in Princeton, in particular Kerry Hoke, program officer. Gyula Vamosi translated the preface of this report into the Romani language. Participants have not had the opportunity to review the contents before publication, for which PER assumes full responsibility.

**Allen H. Kassof**, *President*

**Livia B. Plaks**, *Executive Director*

Princeton, New Jersey

October 2001

## ANGLUNI VORBA

Kon del дума vas e Roma?

O Romano khetanipe numaj ande palune des bersa si pindzardo sar legitimato etnikani minoriteta. Cacikanes nas les politikarno elito; e Romane serutne sas "phurikane", cerra formalne siklarimasa thaj xanci intereso sas len andi politika. Pe aver rig, o nevo serutnipe, so na dulmut astardas te vazdjol, anel xurdi direktno politikaki eksperiencia. Jekh maskar e agorimata si ke o Romano khetanipe si tala e majoritetake politikantengo paternalizmo.

O Projekto vas Etnikane Relacie (PER) ande palune des bersa kerelas butji kaj te del vast te rakhel thaj te kondzharel jekh moderno Romano elito so saj avel jekh biphandli zor ande maskaretnikani dialoga pe e Roma so besen ando Centralno thaj Mizmerig-Disjoriguni Evropa. O PER das troma e terne Romane serutnenge te len repsonsibiliteta ande Romane interessongo phiravipe/reprezentacia thaj diskussie karing e majoriteta. Numaj e neve serutnengo numero, kas si intereso andi politika, vi akana si zuraes cinno, kas pale si, butivar naj len e politikake sajimata. Kadala terne serutne, kon si jekh konstante demokratizaciake processoske produktuma ando Centralno, Disjoriguni thaj Mizmerig-Disjoriguni Evropa, vi akana roden pengi/pumari politikaki identiteta artikulirime.

E Romenge si pharo te arakhen definitivne misala/primera ande avere etnikane minoritetangi eksperiencia. Kadala minoritete tipiko len profito khatar lungo politikaki eksperiencia thaj maj lasi organizacia, thaj unjivar del len vast lengo "dejutno them". Pe aver rig, aver minorititake khetanimata naj musaj te maren pe mamuj ekstremo diskriminacia thaj chorripe so cinnaren e Romengi kapaciteta andi politikaki participacia. Nasti del o manus uzhi vorba pe o phucipe val e Roma si te len kodo "etnikano" ja "civilno" drom te arakhen penge cacimata, soske ci e aver minoritete naj sa dakord ande kadi tema.

O Projekto vas Etnikane Relacie (PER) thaj lesko Romane Advizorengo Konsilo (PERRAC) kerdas jekh seminari so busolas "E Romengo Phiravipe thaj Serutnipe pe e Themutne thaj Maskarthemutne Nivel" ando Krakow, Polska, po 9-10 Tirdaraj, 2001. O seminari kidas khetane jekh grupa e maj senior Romane serutnendar thaj Romane partienge reprezentativurendar thaj Romano NGO-ndar khatar Centralno, Disjoriguni thaj Mizmerig-Disjoriguni Evropa te den дума thaj te diskutin kodo, so e akanutne Romane elitoske si e maj importante phucimata.

E diskussia ando Krakow fokusindas pe legitimaciako mandaipen/miningo

phurikano mamuj moderno thaj demokratikano serutnipe; e serutnengi performancaki kvaliteta; phiravimaske pozitive thaj negative misala; thaj savi rola si te avel e serutnenge. Nesave participantura kritikuisarde e cinni interakcia maskar e moderne Romane serutne thaj lenge khetanimata, thaj phende ke si vazno te avel regularo konzultacia e alosarimaske distriktenca. E participantura buhles diskutisarde e Romane birajipnikane organizaciengi thaj e Romane politikake partiengi eksperiencia, lengo vazdipe ande palune des bersa thaj lenge diferente role thaj godorvalimata. E Romane serutnimasko akanutno pharipe si te sikljol e demokraciake regule thaj procedure, te kerel stabilo organizaciake strukture thaj te vazdel peski performancaki kvaliteta.

E seminaroske dzene diskutisarde e Romani politikaki participiaciaki problema, so si zuraes importante e maskarthemutne organizacienge, guvernonge, politikalne thaj civilne organizacienge thaj vi e Romane serutnenge. E sarethemenge organizacie, so kamen te bararen e Romengi participacia ande dostipe/societeta thaj andi politika thaj te len e Romen ando processo kaj len e decizia, roden legitimate thaj godorvale partneren ando Romano khetanipe.

E Romengo avindo politikako statuso sas jekh aver baro topiko ando Krakow seminari. E participantura duj trendura dikhenas: e Romengo formalno pindzaripe sar minoriteta ande lenge respektive thema, so si aba ande but thema; thaj nesave Romenge aspiracie te keren korko pengi-determinacia, so phenel te pindzardjon e Roma sar jekh bi-territoriaki nacia. E vorbi pasa thaj mamuj kadala mamujale orientacie sas konzidirime, sar so sas дума pe Romani identitetaki konstrukcia, reprezentacia, thaj vi pe politikalne strategiengi thaj programengi evolucia. Sar so azhukardo sas, sas bari duskussia thaj diferente gindura ande kadala topikura.

Kado riporto o Andrzej Mirga ramosardas, kon si o serutno ando PER Romane Advizorengo Konsilo thaj ando Specialist Grupa vash e Roma/Gypsy-ura ando Evropako Konsilo thaj e edicia e PER-eske kollege kerde ando Princeton, maj anglal o Kerry Hoke, program ofisero. E angluni vorba pe Romani tsib parudzia o Gyula Vamosi. E seminaroske dzenen nas sansa te dikhen kado texto anglal e publikacia, kodoleske o PER lel sa e responsabiliteta.

**Allen H. Kassof**, *Prezidento*

**Livia B. Plaks**, *Ekzekutivo Direktorka*

Princeton, New Jersey

Oktobra 2001

## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

*Gypsy* is an English term used to denote ethnic groups formed by the dispersal of commercial, nomadic, and other groups from within India beginning in the tenth century, who mixed with European and other groups during their diaspora. The term *Gypsy* and several European variants of *Tsigan* are considered by many to be pejorative and are often replaced by the more neutral term *Rom*.

*Rom* refers to a member of the group.

*Roma* refers to a plurality of members and to the group as a whole.

*Romani* is used as an adjective.

*Sinti* are members of long-established *Gypsy* communities in Germany and other European countries.

*Gadjo* (plural *Gadje*) is the term used by the *Roma* when referring to a non-*Rom*.



Left to right: Nadezhda Demeter, Livia Plaks, Klara Orgovanova, Nicolae Gheorghe



Left to right: Emil Scuka, Orhan Galjus



Left to right: Nadezhda Demeter, Ondrej Gina, Rudko Kawczynski, Nicolae Gheorghe, Andrzej Mirga

## INTRODUCTION

Who represents the *Roma*? Who has the right to speak in the community's name?

The recent dispute among the *Roma* over who is entitled to handle Holocaust reparation funds for *Romani* victims of the Second World War is a symptom of the community's failure to resolve the ever-present question of its representation and leadership.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, *Romani* elites are increasingly confronted by demands from the national and local governments of the states where they reside to demonstrate more unified leadership and more transparent representation, as a condition for more efficient cooperation with the governments.<sup>2</sup> International organizations voice the same request. While these organizations are, in principle, cooperating with the plethora of *Romani* interest groups in a non-discriminatory manner, the lack of legitimate and widely recognized *Romani* partners makes the question of whom to consult or negotiate with unusually problematic.

Some *Romani* leaders claim that their community is as diverse as society in general, and therefore, a wish to have it unified and uniform runs counter to its reality. State and international organizations should instead do what they can to deal with the *Romani* community's complexity in culture, interests, and representation.<sup>3</sup> While the *Romani* community exhibits a large degree of plurality, the corresponding fragmentation and, not least, the claims and counterclaims of the community's various factions arguably preclude governments and international organizations from fruitful cooperation with *Romani* leadership and representatives in many instances.

A united voice representing the *Roma* and its legitimate leadership is a powerful objective worthy of striving for, and one on which there is a consensus among *Romani* elites. The question is how to reach this objective while facing all the divisive forces operating in the community, including the political immaturity of the *Romani* leadership. This is a question not only of the diversity of the *Romani* community.<sup>4</sup> *Romani* elites must define precisely both why it is necessary and why it is possible to achieve more unified and legitimate representation at the national and international levels.

Until recently the *Roma* were predominantly indifferent toward politics. The traditional *Romani* leadership did not seek positions of author-

ity within state power structures. With the recognition of the Roma as a legitimate minority, however, the conditions for such aspirations have been established. Since the beginning of the 1990s the number of Romani parties and Romani civic organizations in Central and Eastern Europe has multiplied. Establishing formal organizational structures and political representation has been a new and complex task and by all accounts much still remains to be done to expand the Romani elite, strengthen Romani political organizations, and increase Romani participation in public and political life.

The issue of Romani leadership and representation is being addressed by both Roma and non-Roma, and has been appearing ever more frequently in various official proposals.<sup>5</sup> With all the efforts of the international community, including the European Union and various national governments, to improve the situation of the Roma across Europe, the need to have a legitimate and recognized Romani partner has become more pressing. Governments are being called upon to establish appropriate structures and institutions in which Romani views can be voiced and in which Roma have a say in the decision-making process.<sup>6</sup> This is a new opportunity for the Romani leadership, but also a great challenge—to create mechanisms and organizational structures that would help Romani partners increase their legitimacy.

The conditions to reach the Romani leadership's goal of achieving a stronger political role, both in national and international settings, seem to be favorable. The leadership foresees a solution to enduring Romani problems within politics and through politics, and a noticeable tendency to gravitate in this direction is apparent in several countries. On the way, the Romani leadership must come to grips with another challenge, which stems from the often contentious and competitive relations between the Romani civic sector and Romani political organizations or parties. The distinction between these two sectors has been absent within the Romani community until this past decade.<sup>7</sup> With the beginning of the 1990s it became visible, but confusing.

While in the case of minorities the distinction between political parties and the civic sector may be blurred—in some countries minority civic organizations function as political parties—in the case of the Romani minority, the claims and counterclaims of representatives in both sectors have been a major source of disunity. How will the Romani leadership resolve this dilemma?

The issue of Romani leadership and representation is closely related to the question of what legal and factual collective entity the Roma comprise. Whom does the Romani leadership represent? An ethnic or national minority in each of the states they reside in? A Romani nation dispersed across Europe and even beyond it? A Romani transnational minority in Europe?<sup>8</sup>

Calls for a “European approach” toward the Roma have been formulated both by some governments and Romani activists. Within international organizations, structures to address Romani issues in Europe have been established (for example, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues and the post of Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues within the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [ODIHR] of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE], and the Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies at the Council of Europe). What do these structures, which operate at the European level, imply about the status of the Romani population and its representation? What does the “European approach” to Romani issues mean to Romani activists and to mainstream politicians and legislators?

Two recent developments have added a new dimension. The declaration adopted by the International Romani Union (IRU) at its July 2000 convention in Prague<sup>9</sup> requested recognition of the Roma as a nation without a state. On January 24, 2001, the Finnish President Tarja Halonen gave a speech before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in which she called for the Roma to be granted “a ... consultative assembly to represent them on the pan-European level.”

To what degree are such initiatives, which presume or work toward a “transnational” or “European” status for the Roma, compatible with efforts to consolidate the legal position of the Romani population within nation states? What is the relationship between the assertion that the Roma comprise a “non-territorial nation,” as the International Romani Union declared, and the factual reality that sees Romani communities recognized as ethnic or national minorities in given countries? If the IRU option is to be achieved, Romani elites must find a way to surmount the obstacles posed by the intra-ethnic differentiation and fragmentation of the Romani population. Are there specific efforts underway, or a readiness to develop a nationalist Romani ideology that could help them to reach this goal?



The Romani ethnic and political mobilization initiated at the beginning of the 1990s led to developments that have changed the Romani community significantly. Therefore any debate on Romani representation and leadership should proceed with this background as its reference. What are these relevant developments at the local and national levels?

- Regulation of the legal status of the Romani minority within states: in most European states the Roma are recognized as a legitimate national minority, as in Sweden, or as an ethnic minority, as in Hungary. (For more on this topic see the Council of Europe's report "Synthesis of the replies to the questionnaire on participation of minorities in decision-making processes.") [DH-MIN(99)], Strasbourg 1999;<sup>10</sup>
- Continuous development of the Romani civic sector has been encouraged and supported by institutions and foundations both at the national and international levels;
- There has been further development of Romani parties striving for expanded political participation—new strategies have been employed to gain representation in local and nationwide elections; the successful case of Partida Romilor (Roma Party) in Romania is one example;
- A unique solution to the question of Romani representation was provided by the minority self-government system in Hungary;
- A partnership role has been given to Romani leadership in designing policies and programs for the implementation of the EC Agenda 2000 and, as part of the EU accession process, the adoption by governments of national programs to improve the situation of the Romani minority;
- At its December 1999 summit in Tampere, the European Council's Working Group on Enlargement (COECEN Group) adopted a set of "EU Guiding Principles for Improving the Situation of the Roma."<sup>11</sup> This document advises governments to establish advisory bodies with Romani participation, and also calls for employment of Roma within government institutions that deal with Romani issues, for example.

Responding to the challenges that the Romani leadership now faces, the Project on Ethnic Relations convened a group of senior Romani activists in Krakow, Poland to hold an internal, intra-Romani discussion. The questions put to the participants were addressed previously, in part, in

PER's 1997 report, "Roma in the Twenty-First Century: A Policy Paper." Since then, however, these questions have not become the subject of an open and systematic discussion among the Romani leadership. The Krakow seminar was planned as the first in a series of meetings on the issue of Romani leadership and representation. In PER's assessment, the gravity of the subject requires a far larger debate, possibly with other Romani representatives and non-Romani lawmakers and politicians. The Krakow discussion was envisioned as an exploratory seminar to search and evaluate past experience and future options. At this event, PER proposed that regular meetings of the Romani Political Reflection Forum be held to facilitate and encourage the development of Romani political thinking on major issues that concern that community.

As PER's executive director stressed in her welcoming remarks, the Romani leaders have to seize the moment and capitalize on the chance to help resolve many of the problems that have beset their community. Never in the history of the Roma has there been such a moment, such a crossroads, when almost all doors are open. Never has there been such interest in the Romani community as now. With this opportunity, however, the Romani elites will face the great responsibility of guiding their people down the right path. But what is the right path? Who are the right people to guide them? The Roma need to discuss these questions among themselves first and provide answers both to their people and to the majority populations of the countries they inhabit.

## **THE POLITICAL LEGITIMACY OF THE ROMANI LEADERSHIP**

The PER Krakow seminar took place after the first decade that followed the 1989 transition to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. Many Roma turned to civic rights or political activism and emerged as leaders in the aftermath of this transition. Seminar participants saw the Krakow event as an opportunity to discuss this period and to put their own experience to good use. Who are they now after a decade of activism in Europe? What did they accomplish? What did they learn? How do they perceive Romani politics now?

Among the participants were leaders who developed their skills in Romani parties and became members of parliaments. There were others who attained their positions through their involvement in NGOs and in governments and yet others who established themselves by their

involvement in large non-Romani foundations or in Romani organizations of various kinds, be they grassroots or national. Some were tradition-oriented whereas others were modern. Some began their activism in the civic sector and remained there, whereas others considered it a necessary step to become Romani politicians and so enter the main political scene. Yet others began with involvement in politics and later turned toward the NGO sector. Everyone therefore had a different experience to share.

One of the first speakers acknowledged that he has never been elected to his leadership role but has always been self-appointed. He gained experience in the civic sector, using “clean” money and not “dirty” governmental money. He traveled worldwide attending meetings and so became a spokesman for Roma without a mandate to do so. Eventually he started reporting to the Roma on his activities, as opportunities allowed, but not in a systematic way. He learned how to do NGO work and most of the time he has been active within this sector. Only recently did he join an international organization, as Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues at the ODIHR/OSCE office in Warsaw.

Many of the Romani leaders emerged and functioned in this way. Those educated and active in the NGO sector, he continued, used to consider themselves as legitimate, modern democrats, whereas they saw other, more traditional community leaders as illegitimate, outdated, or simply inefficient. Those who joined the NGO sector regarded themselves as well informed about laws and norms on human rights and figured they knew what democracy was all about, dismissing those Roma who were elected to political office as having “sold out” or “collaborated” with *Gadje* (non-Romani) authorities. This Romani NGO representative asked: Why is he considered a modern leader and the “thagar,” or Romani king in Romania, a traditional one? While the “thagar” role has longstanding tradition behind it, that person also heads a Romani organization. In addition, he has been elected to the municipal council and functions as an Evangelical priest within the local Romani community. Such examples, said this participant, show that the reality of Romani leadership is a complex and challenging one.

The preceding remarks underlined the main aspects and contentious nature of the concept of Romani leadership. Two approaches became apparent as the discussion took shape. The first focused on legitimacy issues; its proponents were guided by such questions as: Whom does the

Romani leader represent? What is his mandate? Who delegated him? The participants utilized the dichotomy of traditional versus modern leadership, of self-appointed versus selected within the civic sector and in government, and devoted attention to democratically elected Romani representatives and the Romani parties’ leaders. The second approach, meanwhile, was represented by those who stressed skills, qualifications, and accomplishments. The determining factor here centered on the question: Whose interests do Romani leaders serve? Their own, those of the Romani community at large, or of non-Roma? Some participants oscillated between these two approaches, representing what can thus be termed a moderate position.

## THE TRADITIONAL ROMANI COMMUNITY AND ITS LEADERSHIP

The exponents of the legitimacy approach were eager to compare present-day, or “modern,” Romani leaders with traditional Romani leadership figures—for example, “Sero-Rom” of the Polska Roma group, in Poland; the “vajda” of the Lovara, in Hungary; the “baro” or “vojt” of the Roma in Russia; and the “bulibasha,” or the “thagar,” or king, of Romania’s Roma. As one participant stressed, the traditional leaders were “genuine and legitimate” community representatives in that they were trusted by the Roma and enjoyed authority among them. He argued that traditional does not necessarily mean undemocratic. As in the case of “Sero-Rom,” this participant said that he was given his post by people’s decisions at large gatherings. He commanded legitimacy and was given a mandate to exercise power on behalf of his people. Roma listened to him and respected him.

Unlike traditional leaders, the community’s present-day leaders might be unknown to many Roma they claim to represent; they don’t enjoy such authority and respect among their own people. In the view of this participant, the basic question is this: How did they acquire legitimacy to represent the Roma? While many participants acknowledged that traditional leaders were indeed genuine community leaders, and that the kind of authority and legitimacy they had is missing now, they also emphasized that traditional leaders were not political leaders. In fact, traditional leaders as a rule did not, and do not, enter politics; and when they do so they must modernize, as in the case of the “thagar,” in Romania, who assumed a simultaneous role as the leader of an organization.

As in the case of “Sero-Rom,” he has never been a “public” figure, in the sense of being known to and active in “mainstream” politics. During communism he reacted to some decisions of the state, but he has neither been directly involved in debating state decisions nor in the position to do so. An attempt by Poland’s Roma Association at the beginning of the 1990s to introduce him to the general public and to politics at large was a failure. His fellow Roma opposed it. He remained an internal traditional leader but did not become a “Romani politician.” Into the 1990s, in fact, his authority further eroded within the Polska Roma group. As a result, the Romani community in Poland became divided; part of it remains loyal to and recognizes the authority of the former “Sero-Rom,” whereas the rest splits its loyalties between two additional figures who have emerged over time.

This participant elaborated by explaining that a traditional Romani community was characterized by a lack of any formal structure of social organization, such as those that typify voluntary associations of various kinds, be they oriented to cultural, educational, or philanthropic matters, self-help initiatives, or political representation and participation. In the absence of such structure, the efficacy of the traditional leadership rested on the authority of such figures as mentioned above. They represented the community’s interests before the state authorities and performed an “intermediary” role. However, remarked this participant, such a role was in most cases limited to a local community or group of kinsmen. The state itself was interested in having such individuals among the Roma to facilitate its access to, and communication with, the Romani community. Thus it eagerly accepted such leaders, even searching for someone who enjoyed authority and exercised some degree of command over the community. In all cases, that is, either when a self-appointed individual had unquestioned authority among his people or was recognized and authorized by outside authorities, he had to balance often-conflicting interests: to meet the demands of the state while also serving his own community. The ambiguity associated with such a leadership position was usually even greater, since leaders had to interact with the police, who were designated by the state to deal with the Romani population.

In some cases, state authorities attempted to establish formal organizational structures within the Romani community for the purpose of effectively enforcing state policies. These efforts usually faced two major obstacles: political indifference among the Roma (the predominant atti-

tude of the Roma toward the state and society in the past), and the absence of Romani intelligentsia and intellectuals, which meant a lack of elites who could communicate effectively with state authorities. Moreover, some Romani leaders rejected such cooperation with the state, considering it collaboration rather than cooperation. Withdrawal from, or inability to participate in, the political and communal life of society had ambiguous consequences. While this action served to maintain internal cohesion and identity, it led to ethnic isolation by creating a situation in which the Roma interacted mostly with other members of their community. Meanwhile, the Romani community became subjected to, at best, the paternalistic policies of the state and “toleration” by the majority population.

In Central and Eastern Europe during the communist era, the “intermediary” role played by the Romani leadership was treated by the state as either supportive or subversive; this, based on the degree to which a leader was subordinate to the state authorities. Eventually, governments adopted policies of undermining or eradicating the role of traditional Romani leadership on the premise that such traditional authority subverted state interests, and they “replaced” such leaders with appointed so-called “Romani caretakers,” usually recruited from the ranks of state functionaries or the police. Another way states circumvented traditional authority was to recruit Romani communist party members to become promoters and functionaries of the official party line in the community; and in this sense, “intermediaries” between the state and the community. Thus, up until 1989, the Romani community can hardly be regarded as a politically savvy community, or at least not one aware of its own rights and interests, and having its own formal structures of representation and participation in the communal or political life of the majority population. In fact, the Romani community has been totally dependent on, and subordinated to, state institutions—more often than not, the police forces.

## **THE MODERN ROMANI LEADERSHIP AND ITS PERFORMANCE**

One participant observed that, as a result of the conflict between the traditional leadership and its more modern counterpart, Roma have been inhibited in their emergence as a politically mobilized community. The question of legitimacy remains at the heart of this conflict. Also play-

ing a role is an ongoing redefinition of the modern leadership in traditional terms; or rather, a tendency to treat the new array of possible leadership positions as a new “resource” to be exploited, both in relation to the state and the Romani masses. Still, while many Roma believe in the “power” of their leaders to resolve problems, they rarely seek formal mechanisms for making leaders accountable. This leaves the door open for mismanagement and exploitation, but also leads to growing distrust by the Romani masses toward their leaders. It is imperative that Romani leaders learn from such cases of leadership abuse.

In the view of many participants, the time of traditional leadership has passed; for, they point out, such leadership has been undermined, as the traditional Romani community has been, by modernization. Roma

***While many Roma believe in the “power” of their leaders to resolve problems, they rarely seek formal mechanisms for making leaders accountable.***

must modernize and learn from others. They must follow democratic principles. As one of the speakers noted, among the Roma there is now a new image of what makes a good Romani leader, and the notion of legitimacy does not differ from that held by the majority population. The Roma might still be in

need of leaders who have as much authority as their traditional leaders had, but it is more important now to have leaders who are educated, know how to work in formal organizations, and how to operate in the world of mainstream politics.

In a similar fashion, another speaker stressed that there is no way to combine traditional and modern leadership. As he put it, the Roma would become a “fossilized people” were they to try this. However, he differed in opinion from the previous speaker about how democratic the Roma are. In his view these principles are not yet well rooted in the Romani community; there is no established tradition of selecting leaders according to such principles; many leaders are self-appointed, not elected. More importantly, Roma exercise little control over their leadership, and there are no efforts to design mechanisms that would allow them to do so.

Many participants underlined that they do not claim to represent all of the Roma, but only the constituency of their particular organizations, while others refused to be called “leaders” at all. They acknowledged,

however, that both Roma and state authorities often regard them as leaders. This is due to the positions they occupy in organizations or foundations. As one speaker noted, the concept of Romani leadership is confusing simply because of the multiple roles Romani leaders used to play. There are no distinctions made between the role of a spokesman, a specialist or scholar, a government clerk, a community leader, or a political representative. A Rom’s leadership role seems to entail all of these. As another speaker added, for the past ten years many Romani leaders have been working within both Romani and non-Romani organizational networks for the well-being of the Roma. Everyone claims to know Romani problems best and how to solve them. Perhaps now is the historical moment to question such assertions and try to determine what kind of leadership the Roma need.

Responding to this call, another participant stressed that he does not question who is working where, whether only among Roma or among non-Roma, or whether someone’s legitimacy derives from having been elected or from self-appointment. For this performance-based approach the most important issue is how someone is performing his or her job. The decisive factors in making this judgment are leadership and management skills, said this participant. He prefers not to ask even one Rom whether he is a “genuine” Romani leader, and he himself does not claim to be one. Working for a large foundation, he does, however, expect a degree of Romani appreciation for his achievements.

Along the same line, another participant noted that a good leader must be judged by his achievements and that after ten years it should be easy for the Roma to see who has done something for the community. It is obvious that the Roma need good, modern leaders who are skillful and able to work with Roma, for the Roma, but also with non-Roma. A Romani leader must cooperate with the non-Roma simply because they hold power and possess resources, which are needed to solve Romani problems. At the same time, he must demonstrate that he is reasonable and trustworthy. As he phrased it, a leader must be a person who works “first with his brain, then with his heart, and finally with self-interest.”

Such an idealistic notion of leadership is being compromised too often by the actual performance of Romani leaders, as noted by another participant. Amidst the flurry of liberalization and democratization in the early 1990s, Roma enthusiastically rushed to form organizations. Newly emerged leaders claimed they wanted to act on behalf of the Roma, for

the Roma, and in the Romani interest. In time, however, those who gained even a bit of power began to care more about their personal interests than of the interests of the Romani community they had intended to represent. They entered into and became part of the so-called “Gypsy industry.”

As underlined by another participant, young, educated Roma were also exposed to corrupt practices by the Romani leadership itself. In order to modernize and maintain leadership roles in the new post-communist context, some traditional leaders had to redefine their authority in terms of NGO-based leadership, and so they had to enter into the civic sector and establish their own Romani organizations. However, they faced one basic disadvantage—a lack of education. To overcome this they searched for technical assistance, usually provided by young, educated, English-speaking Roma. Referring to her own experience of this sort, a young Romani woman from Romania stated that traditional leaders of the community treated such Roma more as *Gadje*—that is, as a resource to be exploited. These young Roma, who typically come from partially assimilated families, and are fairly well educated, become an instrument in the hands of traditional leaders to obtain resources for projects. Funding for projects was, however, diverted from original purposes and instead used to raise or strengthen a leader’s own prestige within a community. Yet another way around this was, and in some instances still is, to employ non-Roma to provide technical assistance.

Some Romani leaders understood legitimacy in a narrow sense of numbers—the more members in an organization, the more legitimacy its leader enjoyed in the eyes of the authorities. In order to increase the number of members, as one of the speakers put it, Romani leaders sold “illusions.” They manipulated the Romani masses, which was very easy to do given the level of illiteracy among the Roma. Some modern leaders played a role similar to that of the traditional ones; they functioned as “intermediaries,” trying to bargain between the majority population and the Roma, offering something to everyone. By now, however, they have turned into “service provider” institutions. This brings up a fundamental issue: Who is a Romani leader? Is he only a service provider or a genuine political leader? To become a Romani leader it is not enough, continued this participant, to be an English-speaking Rom who might know how to run projects and sell expertise on the Roma. In contrast with the traditional leader, who was a genuine community leader, the modern counterpart has been reduced to a mere “service

provider.” He considers such a decline of the Romani leadership role unfortunate and destructive; for it breaks Romani trust in leaders and organizations.

## THE MODERN ROMANI LEADERSHIP AND ROMANI TRADITION

A young Romani leader, who originates from a very conservative group of Hungarian Lovara, described a different view of the relationship between traditional and modern leadership. As this speaker admitted, he follows the Lovara tradition: at the age of fifteen he married and he already has two children, the older of which is six years of age. He himself is now twenty-two. There are many other distinctive customs to be observed, since his family, and especially his father, is “one-hundred percent” conservative Rom. Yet, being so conservative, it was his father who, aware of all the changes that were taking place, foresaw the need to educate his son. He realized that it would be more difficult to deal with non-Roma and make a living in the traditional way. As his father used to say to him, “You have to go to school to know the *Gadje* ways better—Then you will be better able to deal with the *Gadje*.” This is why he is presently studying at university, said this participant of himself. More and more Lovara seem to think in this way, he observed; they want their children to attend schools and to obtain university diplomas for pragmatic reasons, but without losing their Romani identity.

In his locality there are two other Romani groups: the Rumungro and Beyasha. Both are less isolated from the non-Roma; they are not as conservative and traditional as the Lovara or Kelderara. Contrary to the Lovara, their women can wear short skirts, girls can go to discos, kiss their boyfriends on the streets, and so forth. However, they don’t speak Romanes. They also want to have their children educated and, in fact, there are more educated people among them than there are among the Lovara; but they consider education not necessarily as a way of better protecting the integrity of their traditions, but rather, as a vehicle to be more *Gadje*-like. However, in the view of this Lovara participant, his desire to become assimilated can hardly be accomplished in practical terms, since to the *Gadje* the Roma remain *Tsigan*. To be accepted by non-Roma—to have them say, “he is like us, he is not like other Gypsies,” a Rom has to play a little with the *Gadjo*’s mind. In keeping with Lovara tradition, the participant introduced a “skin” and “bones”

metaphor to illustrate his point. A Rom has to wear a new “skin,” — that is, get an education, as do the Rumungro. But unlike them, a Rom must keep his “bones”—that is, his tradition and identity.

This participant, who is active in a local NGO run by non-Roma, serves more or less as its Romani spokesman; however, many Roma, including local Rumungro and Beyasha, consider him a leader. Growing up as he did in a conservative environment, he was prepared to maintain his tradition or to bring it into modern organizations. But he soon realized that this doesn't work—simply because, in order to achieve their ends, Roma have to operate with genuine *Gadje* ways. An NGO is not part of Romani tradition, but derives from the traditions of the non-Roma society; still, Roma must use it in their own interest. The question is not whether to reject tradition, including traditional authority, as no longer valid, but how to match Romani tradition and *Gadje* tools. In this day and age, he said, it is imperative that a Romani leader is educated and professional, with knowledge of how to work with the tools of mainstream society. At the same time, he must keep his traditional “core” or “bones.” In the view of this speaker, an effective leader, not necessarily to be called a new one, is a person who dons a new skin—education—but keeps his bones—tradition.

In roughly a decade, the young Roma who are now in schools will replace the present-day leaders. It is now up to them to design a modern leadership model for Roma to aspire to—but what should this be? Who should a Romani leader be? What should he struggle for? The participant cautioned, however, that in the meantime these future leaders are exposed to a new danger. They are tempted by non-Roma to become more “like-them”; they are praised, cherished, and offered jobs. Thus they can be corrupted and lose their Romani “bones.” The Romani leadership must work against such actions by embracing these educated young Roma, investing in them; and, ultimately, keeping them within the Romani movement.

## **THE ROMANI CIVIC SECTOR AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS: THE NEW ROLE OF THE ROMANI LEADERSHIP**

There was a consensus among participants that the modern Romani leadership, in contrast to the traditional one, must be essentially political. Romani leaders must be involved in politics, since only in politics

and through it can solutions be found to the enduring problems of the Roma. Romani leaders, at least the “modern” ones, are responsible for defining Romani interests.

In a modern-day democratic society, the civic sector encompasses a variety of organized interest groups. By definition, organizations of this type are situated outside the existing (state) power structure and administration. Often they are watchdog organizations, as, for example, are human rights organizations. This sector most often remains outside the process of decision-making, which falls within the purview of political parties. The civic sector is also quite diverse, since it is largely rooted in citizens' initiatives and responds to varied particular interests. Contrary to this, political parties are run with the aim of congregating and uniting people around their visions or programs and, ultimately, to gain power through democratic elections.

In the case of minorities, this distinction between the civic sector and political parties may be somewhat blurred. In many states, minority organizations function as de facto political parties; they have a right to form electoral lists and participate in general and local elections. In other countries, minorities can form political parties, and in yet others they are forbidden to form ethnic parties. In a given country, minority rights provisions, electoral laws, or laws on associations and parties may foster different relationships between these two sectors.

The distinction between these various sectors has been absent within the Romani community until the past decade. With the beginning of the 1990s, it became more visible but the distinction was still confusing. For the majority of Romani leaders, heading an organization meant representing the Romani community itself. Irrespective of what kind of organization a leader represented, everyone wanted to be consulted. This has been a major source of contention between Roma involved in political parties and those involved in the civic sector. The competing claims of the Romani leadership caused confusion on the part of state authorities, sometimes leading to a refusal of both party's claims; therefore, no constructive dialogue followed.

As one participant noted, until fairly recently there were few Romani leaders who had experience in mainstream politics—that is at the level of parliaments or governments. Thus, there is an insignificant level of experience accumulated on which to build. Initially, like in the early 1970s in the former Yugoslavia, there were leaders who represented the

Roma but in cultural rather than political terms. Later on, some Romani leaders entered into politics through the “back doors” of mainstream parties; however, they can hardly be considered as struggling for and promoting Romani interests. A new stage came with the formation of Romani parties or Romani associations that strove to place their representatives in parliaments at the beginning of the 1990s. Some of them, like the Party for the Total Emancipation of the Roma (PTEMR), in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, or, the Partida Romilor association in Romania, managed to place representatives one by one in parliaments. In the first round of elections in the aftermath of the “velvet revolution,” the Romani Citizens’ Initiative (ROI) in the Czech Republic gained even more ground in terms of national representation.

ROI participated in the election as a partner in the large democratic coalition that swept the former regime from power, and received nearly a dozen seats in parliament. Despite this quantitative success, the Romani members of parliament (MPs) accomplished little. As one of these Czech Romani MPs recalled, they were inexperienced, did not know how to conduct politics from within, had to learn on the job, and, most importantly, they neither had any partners to work with nor were they considered a political partner. In the next elections, in 1992, ROI lost all of its seats. This happened not only because of political inexperience, but also because the democratic coalition started to fall apart once its member parties began to assert their particular interests and identities. Thus, the majority parties competing for power among themselves were no longer interested in putting Romani candidates on their electoral lists. The Roma were forced to run on their own—and they lost. At the same time, since 1992 in the Czech Republic the Romani community has been exposed to such a degree of growing racism and even violence that human rights and civic organizations have mobilized to counter this trend. Therefore Romani activists who might otherwise have been involved directly in politics turned to the civic sector, and ROI ultimately lost its earlier position.

The next stage came with the improvement of states’ minority policies toward the Roma. Recognition of the Roma as a legitimate ethnic or national minority, and especially state efforts to develop comprehensive policies and programs for Roma since the middle of the 1990s, opened new opportunities for Romani leaders to improve their political skills. Some joined advisory bodies established at the government level, while others were recruited to various posts in state administration.

Hungary’s minority self-government system contributed even more to the expansion of this class of Romani politicians, both at the national and local levels. Undoubtedly this stage in the overall process of Romani political involvement helped “politicize” the community’s problems and thus kept them on governments’ policy agendas.

The most recent stage of the process has been marked by efforts to mobilize and increase Romani participation in local and national elections, so as to ensure the community better representation in legislative bodies at both levels. Romani leaders have employed a variety of strategies: joining majority parties, setting up new Romani parties, fostering election coalitions among Romani partners, or signing coalition agreements with majority parties. Some of these strategies proved effective. The case of Partida Romilor in Romania is a key example.

As recalled by Partida Romilor’s former leader, who had also served as an MP, Romania’s Roma saw great success in the November 2000 general elections. The Partida Romilor signed an election protocol with the Party of Social Democracy of Romania (PDSR), the main opposition party at the time, and thus entered the election as its coalition partner. The PDSR won the election. Implementation of the electoral protocol provided Partida Romilor with two seats in Parliament for the first time and with a number of governmental posts. More importantly, said this participant, Romani MPs started to play significant roles within the government; one became the chair of the Human Rights Commission, while another was appointed deputy chair of the Commission on Culture. This participant himself is presently an adviser on minority issues to the President of Romania; this, after seven years of experience as an MP. In order to get things done, he said, the Roma require the support of a political partner. In the present Parliament, the Roma have such a partner, and the situation is promising.

During Bulgaria’s recent parliamentary elections, the Romani leadership in that country tested a similar strategy and achieved some noticeable results. There is however still a great need, as one of participants stressed, for a Roma-to-Roma dialogue to overcome fragmentation among the Romani leadership for education on civic and political rights, and for increasing Romani self-esteem. The fact remains that there is great disparity between the number of Roma and their parliamentary representation in some countries; Roma are strongly under-represented in elected bodies.

The disunity among the Romani leadership, so often stressed in public, resulted not only because of political inexperience or the early stage of development of political thinking among the Roma and their political organizations. In ten years or so, as observed by one of the participants, it would have been simply impossible for the Roma to have developed political parties comparable with non-Roma who developed them for a hundred years or more. To be on the political scene, such parties or organizations need to have sufficient infrastructure and a larger and stable constituency. In the case of the Roma, fulfilling these requirements has usually been hard to accomplish, as hard as securing funds. This is why Romani parties or political organizations have been weak.

In some countries the Romani leadership made an effort to more precisely define the roles of Romani parties and the civic sector. In 1997 in Romania, as one of the speakers recalled, a compromise was reached. Leaders of both sides that have been in controversial discussions for a long time decided that some Romani associations, such as Partida Romilor, should play a major role in the political sphere—that is, participate in general and local elections, while others should not interfere and should remain active within the civic sector. Similar efforts, but to a lesser degree, are also being implemented in other countries, as in Bulgaria and Slovakia. In Hungary the problem was solved by a provision of the Minority Act of 1993 that entrusted the elected minority self-government with sole representation rights.

In comparison with political organizations, the Romani NGOs, or civic sector, have always been more efficient in attracting various funds, often foreign ones. International governmental organizations, as well as private organizations and large foundations, supported and encouraged the civic sector's development as part of their efforts to create democratic societies in the former communist countries of the region. Easier access to more funds that were coming into the civic sector resulted in a proliferation of Romani NGOs. The civic sector attracted the most educated Roma, who considered this a more fruitful and promising career than what was offered by Romani political organizations. In fact, as many participants claimed, Romani political organizations were deserted, especially by young, educated, and often foreign-language-speaking Roma.

For most of the participants, this relationship continues to be contentious. In the past few years, as one participant observed, the Romani civic sector has been under scrutiny—and under attack. Romani NGOs

have been accused of not following democratic principles, since most of their leaders are self-appointed. They were often running fake family or clan-oriented businesses, with no rules of transparency observed. The leaders functioned in the civic sector rather like businessmen, serving *Gadje* interests more than they did Romani interests. In the eyes of many, the Romani NGO activists are to be blamed; this, on the premise that they “sold out” to non-Romani organizations and institutions, both intergovernmental and private. During the most recent IRU Congress, in Prague, similar criticism of this sector was voiced. A strong call was made at this event for Romani activists to enter politics by joining political organizations and seeking new legitimacy along democratic rules.

Some participants openly acknowledged that they have ambitions to enter into mainstream politics. They conceive of the NGO activity they are involved in as a necessary stage on the road to more direct political involvement; this, because as they see it, Romani leaders need to learn *Gadje* “concepts, ideologies,” and political (party) orientations. Otherwise, the non-Romani politicians with whom they need to cooperate will not comprehend them. In the view of others who work at NGOs, the NGO arena only supplements “mainstream” politics. They tend to see the Romani issue as essentially political. In some countries Roma have yet to reach the stage of party formation; in others, due to their modest number, the Romani civic sector will continue to play a major role in representing the community's interests. And in such states as the Czech Republic, where the Roma experienced relative success at party politics at the beginning of the 1990s, they have reverted to voicing their interests most actively through NGOs.

## ROMANI POLITICS AND ROMANI INTERESTS

Participants were divided in their opinion of what serves Romani politics and Romani interests better—civic sector activism or political parties. Some considered it premature to go ahead with the formation of a Romani party in their countries; more preparatory work must be done on the spot, among the Roma in local communities, to accomplish such a project. Such a strategy was adopted in the Czech Republic, as mentioned by one participant; Romani activists are working on establishing a new base at the local and regional levels. Another participant observed that in some countries, such as Slovakia, the Romani party's leadership itself has delayed the resolution of Romani problems by behaving in a



rather destructive manner, focused more on competitive claims over leadership than on solving issues. As other participants saw it, the main factor in the demise of Romani efforts at party formation has been the absence of a well-worded Romani political ideology that would unite the Roma around clear objectives; Romani activists have yet to articulate such an ideology. Some of those on hand even cautioned that a Romani party might not be such a good thing; for political success could only be realized by playing the ethno-political card; in other words, the leadership of such a party would inevitably exploit ethnic rhetoric. This is the last thing the Roma need, said these participants.

Yet another participant brought up the example of those Romani leaders who joined mainstream parties. Should the Roma seek this path as well? How do we judge choices made by some leaders who joined Milosevic's party, or others who have occupied top government posts in the coalition led by Vojislav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party, or someone who was in the government in Kosovo during the Milosevic regime? Their motivation, this speaker continued, didn't differ from that of other leaders; for all of them claim to be acting in the interest of the Roma. There is not any debate among the Romani leadership on political ideologies they would be ready to follow or support. This is also a challenging issue regarding the behavior of Romani voters.

In an ad hoc overview of the evolution of Romani organizations and Romani interests, one participant proposed the following categories:

- non-Romani organizations with a “Romani” agenda, where Roma are the objects of non-Romani activities and interests
- organizations that include non-Roma and Roma but that are led by *Gadje*, with the Roma performing minor roles; Roma function there as a justification for the Romani agenda
- Romani organizations with Romani leadership, but which employ non-Roma to help secure resources
- Romani organizations, national and international, with all Romani leadership and staff, where the Romani interests behind the agenda and activities are clearly asserted and articulated
- Roma who participate in mainstream parties; these people are motivated by self-interest and, in effect, hide or divert Romani interests with some dangerous consequences to the Romani community; the former Yugoslavia being a prime example

- Romani political parties that aim to collaborate with some mainstream parties; while the Romani interest is subjected to the interests of a more powerful party, such Romani parties can nonetheless prosper and develop
- autonomous Romani parties that do not seek such collaboration, but whose time has yet to come
- Romani parties on the international level, which might be established in the future

Regardless of the degree to which this ad hoc categorization reflects the reality of Romani organizations, the effort itself marks a forward step in the development of Romani political thinking. Its key feature, however, is the continued strong presence of the Roma–non-Roma divide. In defining Romani interests, the reference point all participants either cited directly or alluded to was the *Gadje* interest (i.e. that of *Gadje* authorities), which was invariably viewed as adverse or incompatible with Romani interests. However, participants encountered far more difficulty in asserting just what Romani interests are or should be.

The Romani leadership itself rarely addressed such questions in the past, and has not yet provided clear answers. Romani interests seem to remain a moving target in all debates concerning Roma. Two recurring questions surfaced in the Krakow discussion: What do the Roma want? What are “Romani interests?” The participants were conscious that at the current stage of development of Romani politics in Europe, such a clear message by the leadership is expected both by the Romani community and non-Romani majority. The debate on this issue revealed that the Romani leadership has yet to reach a consensus.

Two approaches in particular seem most indicative of the efforts of the Romani leadership to come to grips with the issue of positively asserting Romani interests. According to the first, there are basically two different discourses or ways to address Romani interests. The *Gadje* way, in general, aims to preserve the existing status quo, which is to keep the Roma where they are—under control. Non-Roma define Romani interests as they see them, and this invariably implies integration. They want to solve Romani problems in a *Gadje* way—through policies, programs, and projects, but, say Roma, this road just does not work. As one participant remarked, those Romani leaders who seek “positions, projects, and money” follow the *Gadje* way; resources are received and a

lot of projects are carried out. No one dares ask the Romani masses if such efforts contribute to the improvement of their situation. The Roma are simply told what is good for them. The status quo will be preserved and not much will change in the Romani situation. The participant who presented this view has been skeptical about whether current

***Contrary to government policies that favor integration, the Romani community faces increasingly contentious relations with majority populations.***

policies and programs sponsored by the EU and by particular countries in the West will help solve Romani problems. They aim essentially to stabilize the situation of the Romani population, and this means that, as in the past, the Roma are viewed as a marginalized group who must be helped by the non-Roma, through an ever growing number of projects (many of them carried out

by an increasing number of non-Romani social workers). As this participant sees it, such initiatives overlook a basic point—the Roma wish to live without being told what is good for them.

This speaker also identified Romani interests as a discourse on human rights. The only important question here, he said, is whether Roma are facing discrimination and racism. He urged Romani leaders to return to Romani communities and become advocates for civic and human rights. There is no money in such work, only the certainty of confrontation with state authorities. The “Romani way” basically strives to uphold the level of Romani participation in public life and politics along the principles of non-discrimination and equality. This is the way to change the existing status quo, which keeps the Roma in a disadvantaged position. The Roma essentially face the problems of discrimination and insecurity, but there is no proper action against it. While conducting their activities, many Romani organizations do not know exactly what they are doing or whom they are in fact working with, Roma or non-Roma.

The second approach to asserting Romani interests was described by another participant. According to him, Romani politics are essentially about coexistence with non-Roma. The Romani leadership might say, “The Roma have problems,” whereas, non-Romani politicians are more inclined to say, or suggest, “The Roma are the problem.” This is the

major difference between the Romani and non-Romani perceptions of the question of coexistence. Government policies and programs try to “integrate” the Roma. This concept, however, as the speaker stressed, is hardly well defined; not much is said about exactly what integration means and how it can be realized. For the time being, the Romani civic sector tends to follow non-Romani objectives without clear comprehension of what Romani interests are at stake. Contrary to government policies that favor integration, the Romani community faces increasingly contentious relations with majority populations.

As in the case of the Czech Republic, this participant continued, atrocities against the Roma that erupted in the early 1990s and have continued since then have compromised the above-mentioned policy of integration. In 1997, in a spontaneous reaction against this situation, some Roma left the country and asked for asylum in Western countries. Romani migration has markedly changed he observed; it led to the collapse of earlier state policies toward the Roma as well as the collapse of Romani politics itself. It also worked to elevate the importance of the Roma in bilateral and international relations by designating their situation a “hot” issue, one that must be at the top of government agendas. Now the Czech Republic is inventing a new policy toward the Roma. This speaker expressed his criticism over the government policy of naming Romani advisers, assistants, and inter-ministerial commission members. Those selected provide an “alibi” to the government’s policy, which he deems contrary to the Romani interest. The state authorities corrupt the Roma working for them, he said, and because these Roma find themselves in the fold of a state structure, they are compelled to do what the authorities say. This is, in effect, a way of depriving the Romani community of valuable activists; those who resist might face repression. It leads to disunity among the Romani leadership and confusion within the Romani community.

For the time being, as some participants admitted, those who design what might be termed “Romani politics,” especially at the international level, are predominantly NGO activists and leaders. The few Romani representatives elected to public office in individual states play a lesser role in this process; for they are more restricted in their activities and, in any case, less interested in the international scene—which is the very issue that most attracts the Romani civic sector. Therefore such NGO officials are truly the Romani elite. They travel around Europe and par-

ticipate in meetings; they are involved in “Romani politics,” designing programs and policies at the national and international levels. They do not suffer; they are well paid. Much has been invested in them. What is their role and responsibility?

The question of Romani leadership is as much one of legitimacy as it is one of responsibility. The criticism expressed by many participants against the Romani leadership applies especially to the NGO representatives. They must be confronted with, and acknowledge the fact that they are not wholly innocent, that they are not free of the tendency to manipulate others. They “want to drive a horse,” one participant remarked, “but not to be driven by a horse.” They participate in endless meetings and stir up the usual fanfare—but do they come up with new ideas? International organizations and governments are mobilized to solve Romani problems, but are the Romani elites similarly mobilized? Are they capable of not simply going with the flow, so to speak, but of anticipating it?

## ROMANI POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Within the Romani community the notion of representation has usually been understood as concomitant with Romani leadership. As a rule, both the community and leaders overlooked the defining factors of any representation claim—that is, the issue of legitimacy. Strong dedication to fight for Romani interests has been considered sufficient to justify one’s right of representation. The modern Romani leadership has ques-

***The legitimacy issue remains key, since it is a prerequisite for full recognition of a Romani partner for dialogue.***

tioned this rather popular notion of representation. The ongoing debate has revealed that the legitimacy issue remains key, since it is a prerequisite for full recognition of a Romani partner for dialogue, consultation, and decision-making with a government and/or interna-

tional organizations. It comprises questions of both democratic procedures and working organizational structures.

As regards the latter, a variety of organizations representing both the civic and political sectors operate within the Romani community. In general, civic sector organizations outnumber those with a political

agenda and attract the most educated Romani elites. Few political organizations or parties have stable and well-defined structures that would attract larger Romani constituencies. It has been asserted that within the Romani civic sector democratic procedures are hardly observed. The outcome is that there are numerous self-appointed NGO leaders who assume a representation role because of what they do to construct “Romani politics;” and those few elected leaders and representatives who do enjoy legitimacy are less vocal as political players. It seems, therefore, that the enduring dilemma the Romani leadership faces about political representation originates both with this incongruous relationship between the civic sector leadership and leadership in the political arena, and with the inconsistency between democratic procedures and organizational structures.

Disregarding this assertion, the participants were of different opinions about whether the Romani community actually enjoys any substantive degree of political representation. Some of the participants said the Romani community effectively has no such representation. As one person asserted, throughout the last decade the Roma have failed to establish political representation that would be widely recognized and granted status as a negotiating partner at the highest political level by non-Romani political forces. Efforts to create “umbrella” organizations, both at national and international levels, were usually short-lived and did not yield results. Another participant noted that the Roma have been “lost,” for the past three decades—unable to create structures or institutions that would lay the basis for Romani political representation. People tend to coalesce around stable structures or institutions, but in the case of Roma these were missing; Roma supported leaders who came and went. For the moment, participants agreed, Romani leaders act individually without thinking about what others are doing; there is no solidarity among the leadership. Yet for another speaker, it has been not only a question of need but of the time for action being right, since Romani issues have become a political factor in present-day Europe. The Roma have already learned how to conduct NGO work and have well trained activists, but they lack strong political representation.

According to another participant, there are some initiatives underway that are worthy of mention, even if they have been less than successful. In the Czech Republic, he recounted, Romani leaders associated with the Roma National Congress (RNC) network organized an elec-

tion of Romani representatives at the local and regional levels. Those elected, however, were rejected by the authorities. In fact, two kinds of legitimacy and representation clashed in this case, the Roma's own effort and the state sponsored system of Romani assistants and advisors. Whereas the authorities questioned the legitimacy and mandate of the network to hold such elections, Romani leaders associated with the RNC questioned the legitimacy of those selected or appointed by the state authorities. The overall outcome has been confusion and disputes among the Roma.

The example of the Romani self-government in Hungary provided another set of problems about the establishment of legitimate Romani representation. The minority self-government system was introduced by the 1993 Minorities Act. According to its key provision, all legally recognized minorities in Hungary are entitled to establish their own self-governments at the municipal and national levels. The overall system is sponsored by the state. The contentious issue has been the fact that every citizen may vote and participate in elections of minority self-government bodies. This general rule has been questioned by some activists in the Romani civic sector who claim that since non-Roma can vote for representatives of Romani self-governments, this does not make for genuine Romani representation.<sup>12</sup> Several participants commented on the issue of direct or indirect involvement of the state in establishing Romani political representation. They questioned whether Roma should accept as legitimate those representatives selected by governments or international institutions. Those selected would, they say, inevitably be prone to corruption; for they would be forced to follow their sponsor's interests or objectives. Otherwise they would face the prospect of losing their privileged positions. As a result, such representation would divert them from promoting Romani interests and would serve non-Romani interests more. One of these participants pointed out that ensuring the promotion of exclusively Romani interests, without interference by non-Roma, requires democratic procedures, adequate organizational structures, and resources. For the time being, he said, no existing Romani organizational structure provides a promising base from which to expand legitimate Romani political representation, whether nationally or internationally.

## THE INTERNATIONAL ROMANI UNION (IRU) PROJECT—ROMANI NATION

Representatives of IRU have taken a radically different approach to the debate on Romani representation. What has been missing in the discussion above has been spelled out clearly by IRU—that Romani political representation is about representation of the Romani nation. This sole representation role has been assumed by IRU itself. The declaration that includes the words, “We, The Roma Nation, Have a Dream,” which IRU adopted at its Prague congress (24-28 July 2000), has become the most challenging event in the field of Romani politics to date. With its subsequent actions, IRU's Presidium and President promoted that declaration, and IRU attracted worldwide media attention.<sup>13</sup> The declaration goes on to say that IRU is seeking recognition of the Roma as a nation without a state. With the adoption of the organization's new charter, however, which established a Congress, Parliament, Presidium, Court of Justice, and President, IRU's project much more resembles a state structure.

The IRU declaration became a starting point for the intense debate at PER's Krakow seminar on the status of Roma in present-day Europe. As one of the participants underlined, Roma are treated *de jure* and *de facto* either as an ethnic or national minority. Governments and numerous Romani organizations aim for consolidation of this legal position of Roma in society and to strengthen their rights as citizens and as a minority. To what extent, therefore, does the IRU request challenge the existing status quo on the treatment of Roma? What in fact would eventual recognition of Roma as a nation change in the situation of Romani communities in the countries they live in? The IRU project seems to solve at least one problem, that of political representation of the Roma at the international level, but it is exactly this representation right that was most objected to and contested by other participants. On the other hand, how is IRU going to overcome intra-ethnic fragmentation within the Romani population, which is borne partly of cultural differences? Is there a readiness to develop a nationalist ideology, and have there been efforts to this end?

As the IRU representative explained, the organization's project responds to the frequently asked question: What do the Roma want? It offers a vision. The IRU request comes at the right time, since Europe has become more attentive to the Roma. Problems Roma face everywhere

in Europe mobilize governments and international organizations to seek solutions. What is the Romani response? The declaration signals the Roma's aspiration to obtain a new status that would provide the Roma with respect and their own place among nations—that is, a place within international organizations like the United Nations or the Council of Europe. The new status of the Roma would make this people a subject

***What brings Roma together, unites them, is their nationhood; once Roma realize this they can counter non-Roma's questioning of Romani unity and whether Roma have genuine representation.***

of international law; it would entitle Romani representatives to conclude bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements. The declaration is not about IRU or support for IRU, but about the people themselves, the Romani nation.

When, eight years ago, he continued, he proposed the idea of a nation without a territory, many said it was a utopian vision. Then it was, but it is no longer. What brings Roma together, unites them, is their nationhood; once Roma realize this they can counter non-Roma's questioning of Romani unity and whether Roma have genuine representation. The assertion of Romani status should not be left to non-Roma; Roma must define it themselves. In this project IRU pays particular attention to the Romani language—the “mother and soil of our nation”—and to the construction of a Romani university. The university would not only be a vehicle of education, but also instrumental in setting up a foundation that will maintain and develop a nation. Finally, IRU is requesting European citizenship to be granted to Roma; they are entitled to it because their homeland is Europe. But, for more than seven hundred years now, which represents the span of their presence in Europe, this homeland has been denied to them. As this participant underlined, there is no nationalist overtone to this project. IRU itself has been renewed, he said. After heavy criticism from all fronts IRU adopted a new structure that operates democratically; it seeks legitimacy among the Roma. IRU ended its practice of “cabinet politics” and intends to conduct real political activities, mobilizing the overwhelming majority of Roma who are inactive, who fall outside of any organizational structure.

## **THE IRU PROJECT—CONCERNS AND OBJECTIONS**

The reservations many participants raised about the IRU project did not refer to the concept of the Roma being a nation. For most of those on hand, it has been self-evident for a long time that the Roma are a nation. As one participant argued, the Roma represent a different “ethnos” in Europe, which forms the basis for the assertion of nationhood. As stressed by the representative of the RNC, the notion of Romani nationhood is embedded in the very name of this organization. It is something else, however, to share such a conviction among the Roma themselves than to come forward with a political request to have it recognized legally. The essential question here is not only its feasibility under international law, but what such international recognition would in fact bring to the Roma. The potential positive and negative outcomes must be debated.

In fact, most points of IRU's request have been on the agenda of other Romani organizations for a long time. In a 1991 resolution of the European Romani Parliament (EUROM), the Roma requested, among other things, to be proportionally represented within international organizations in Europe and in governments, and that the EUROM be entitled to supervise all projects targeting Roma. Among the necessary tasks, the resolution listed the drafting of statutes for European representation of Roma, organizing the first Europe-wide Romani election, and establishing and maintaining contacts with European institutions. This resolution was later adopted by the RNC as well, and, with some modification, included in its European Romani Rights Charter.<sup>14</sup> The difference between EUROM and later RNC proposals and IRU is that whereas the former foresaw direct elections as a way to establish Romani representation at the European level, the latter assumed this role itself.

The IRU declaration, as another participant noted, is not a novelty; for the notion that the Roma are a “non-territorial” or “European” minority was introduced by Resolution 1203 (1993) on Gypsies in Europe of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. This is exactly what IRU is now declaring.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of introducing these concepts in the resolution was to justify the “special” measures Roma would benefit from. For several years the name of Nicolae Gheorghe has been associated with these concepts. Romani Rose, the head of the Central

Council of German Sinti and Roma (Zentralrat) has by contrast strongly criticized any policy of “special treatment” for the Roma; as a result, he and his organization have left the Romani movement. Few Romani leaders have struggled in international institutions to develop political and legal language on the Roma; a body of documents exists that could be used to this end, but, said the present speaker, the Romani leadership has not used these documents.

What, therefore, makes the IRU declaration resonate now, whereas similar ideas embedded in resolutions of certain international organizations and Romani representative bodies went unnoticed in the past? Several participants pointed to the particular role of the Czech Republic. As never before, a Romani organization found a strong partner—a government that has been ready to support and promote the idea of the Roma being a European nation.<sup>16</sup> With such a backer, IRU was able to proceed with a media campaign. While many participants were eager to view the IRU campaign as positive—international headlines concerning the Roma were, after all, diverted from such subjects as the illegal emigration of “bogus” Romani asylum seekers—they were deeply suspicious about the Czech government’s interest in supporting the IRU project.

In 1997, as one participant recalled, the Czech Republic used Resolution 1203 to internationalize Romani issues. Prague was under heavy criticism at the time because of the effects of a new citizenship law it had introduced, resulting in thousands of Roma becoming stateless, and generating the first waves of Romani asylum-seekers. Romani activists and international organizations became alarmed. What were the Czech government’s intentions? Was it using the notion that Roma are a “transnational” or “European” minority, as it was worded in the resolution, to legitimize Romani statelessness and exodus and thus to denounce the state’s responsibility toward its citizens? The Czech authorities were openly confronted with these worries at a meeting of the Council of Europe Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies in Prague in 1998. This was why, this participant continued, Romani activists began issuing stronger calls for minority rights provisions for Roma; after all, Roma are not only citizens, but a legitimate minority, of each country they live in. The state’s responsibility in this regard cannot be transferred to European institutions. Such worries certainly appeared well grounded given the nationalist rhetoric voiced in some countries. For example, Vadim Tudor, a Romanian nationalist, had openly called for

his country’s borders to be opened—so that the Roma could, and would, emigrate to (Western) Europe.

In the view of other participants, the Czechs have long promoted a “European” approach to Romani problems, hence their eagerness to support the notion of Romani nationhood. However, opponents of the IRU project wonder what it would mean to be recognized as a nation within another nation? Would this mean that, in the Czech Republic for example, the Roma are no longer Czechs? As one participant underlined, if someone offers something, one can rightly wonder what he will ask for in return. What therefore is the interest of the Czech government in sponsoring this idea? Some participants opined that the Czechs simply want to be perceived by the international community as progressive and thus clear up their relatively poor record on Roma; and so it serves them well to support the IRU project.

### **THE IRU PROJECT AND THE ROMANI DELAYED NATIONALIST “TEST STAGE”**

Despite IRU’s declaration that it has no nationalist agenda, several participants saw such an agenda as ingrained in its rhetoric. For opponents of the IRU project, going ahead with it meant proceeding on a nationalist track. This is inevitable when calling for the same rights other nations have, for a people to be restored their sense of nationhood, when talking in terms of symbols and national interest, about language as “mother and soil,” and about past sufferings—whether discrimination in general or the Holocaust—and so forth. One participant said he had often heard Romani activists “sing this nationalist tune,” and that sometimes he himself sang it among the Roma. Every form of nationalism tries to monopolize political discourse along with concrete power, he observed, adding that IRU has monopolized the Romani scene for three decades, claiming to be the only genuine representative of the Roma. But history and the very recent past provide enough examples of where such thinking leads, and the Romani leadership must be made aware of its dangerous consequences.<sup>17</sup>

In modern times, he continued, every nation has undergone a state in which its vitality is “tested” through attempts by elites to construct nationhood by such means as revitalizing past traditions, inventing a narrative of history, and codifying language. Such efforts have been

undertaken in the context of territorial claims, of nation-state building as the ultimate nationalist objective. Some nations or cultures failed and thereafter died or disappeared—as a result of assimilation processes that followed under the pressure of modernization. But many nations passed the test successfully. Are the Roma presently undergoing a “delayed nationalist-test stage,” asked this participant, or are they already in a crisis phase, brought on by modernization?

The Roma have been in crisis for a long time, he said, and this is exacerbated by their leadership’s sometimes desperate search for new ways out. Modernization has undermined Romani traditions, values, and organizational structures, and left the Roma in a sort of limbo with no clue as to whether to hold and embrace traditions or to opt for integration and assimilation. To reject modernization means to remain isolated, as in the past. Some Romani groups deliberately keep an arm’s length from integration. Others—often those that are already the most acculturated to the larger world—want to integrate or even assimilate. Therefore the Romani leadership faces a basic dilemma, or, as he put it, a “real drama,” in choosing a path to follow.

The IRU project seems to resemble a “delayed nationalist-test stage,” and many of those at the Krakow meeting opposed it for this reason. If they continue along these lines, argued another participant, the Roma will find themselves on a dead-end road. For at least two decades now, the IRU agenda has been packed with such ideas as developing a “Roma codex,” codifying the language, and “renewing” old traditions and values—ideas the Romani masses really didn’t care all that much about. Some time ago, continued this participant, two well-known Romani leaders told him that they were afraid to walk through the streets of Warsaw. This, he said, is really what matters—the Roma fear insecurity. The Romani leadership bears a responsibility to address the central problem of providing the Roma with security. How the Roma will live their lives is a secondary concern. This is a matter of individual choice.

This speaker, representing the RNC, now elaborated on his worries over nationalist rhetoric—specifically, discourse in which Roma are debated as an ethnic group, an “ethnos,” or unified nation, is troubling in his view, for it is inevitably tied to ethnocentrism and racism. Roma share a multitude of identities born out of countries and nations they live in, and they have borrowed much from others. In fact, the Roma are an

ethnic mixture and, he said, this is positive. This is why “Romani nationalism” should be understood, this speaker suggested, in terms of a “universal nationalism” best exemplified by a creed central to American nationalism: “We are all Americans, but we are all different.” Such a notion of Romani nationalism should be realized as the glue that ties together a variety of Romani groups—and this is anti-Gypsy sentiment. One must accept that the Roma are diverse, hold different traditions and cultures, and that any attempt to forge a unitary nationhood out of them is fruitless. Instead, the Romani leadership must work actively for the Roma’s most urgent interests.

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Other participants expressed doubts as to how serious the IRU project is or can be. As one pointed out, the IRU project will not progress until private foundations, international organizations, or governments see fit to pay for its implementation. Another recalled a lesson of history: no one nation has successfully found its place among other nations without suffering and bloodshed. Are Romani nationalists ready to lead their people down this road, too? Another participant questioned whether the Roma should seek nationhood at all, given that the effort itself is unprecedented. Why must Romani leaders take their people in this direction now? They should instead devote themselves more to ensuring a secure position for their people within civic society.

Leaving aside the obvious matter that IRU’s demand to be recognized as a nation without a territory and a state is a contradiction in terms, said another participant, this initiative would, at best, lead to some kind of self-governing body approved by international organizations. Some Roma would be offered grand positions and would be asked to sign protocols and agreements. The whole process would free individual states of their responsibility to address the problems of Romani citizens. Those participants who concurred that the struggle for nationhood offers nothing to the Romani masses stressed that it is far more crucial for the Romani leadership to actively debate whether, for example, the model of minority self-government instituted in Hungary is a good way to address the problems their people face.

Being given a certain status will certainly not help prevent discrimination or violence, emphasized one participant. In the early 1990s, he recalled, Roma in Romania were *de facto* recognized as a national minority; they were guaranteed (a minimal degree of) representation in Parliament. At the same time, Romani houses were set on fire in many communities. This issue played a part in the OSCE debate on setting up the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues. The following alternatives were discussed: placing it under the aegis of the High Commissioner for National Minorities or ODIHR. Two Romani activists in particular carried on a vocal debate over what the best option was: Andrzej Mirga argued that it would be best to place it within the High Commissioner's office, headed by Max van der Stoep, saying that this would reinforce Romani calls for countries to introduce minority rights provisions. Nicolae Gheorghe disagreed, however, saying that the Roma would be better served by having the Contact Point within ODIHR, putting an emphasis on anti-discrimination; and so it happened.

In the last decade, continued this participant, Romani activism has been guided by an orientation on social improvement, human rights, and minority rights. In the PER report "The Roma in the Twenty-First Century: A Policy Paper" (1997), Mirga and Gheorghe discussed these positions, including the notion of the Romani nation. Few Romani leaders offered comments. The Romani leadership, said this participant, requires an open debate, one without efforts to monopolize discourse, over these orientations and the ensuing priorities.

Responding to all this criticism, the IRU representative pointed out the following:

- There are no grounds to fear the stirrings of incipient nationalism in the IRU project. Romani history, in contrast with that of non-Roma, reveals a decided lack of nationalism. Indeed, the Roma were invariably at the receiving end of persecution; they suffered racism, fell victim to the Holocaust, and face discrimination to this day. The Roma did not take up arms to fight back. To do so is not part of the Romani identity.
- The IRU call for the Roma to be recognized as a nation is in fact a response to the challenge of globalization. Nationhood would give the Roma an avenue into the fold of globalization, into its politics as well as economics.<sup>18</sup> The Romani leadership must expand its discourse on this subject.

- IRU had a mandate to issue this request, as set forth by its Prague congress in 2000, which was attended by 250 Romani representatives from all over Europe. IRU is determined to obtain even greater legitimacy among the Roma. It aims to secure the respect of governments as well, which is necessary if IRU is to make progress. There are three ways of dealing with the non-Roma: collaboration, partnership, and the refusal of any relationship whatsoever. The last option is absurd. Collaboration means corruption; IRU has avoided this route. IRU seeks partnership with state authorities—but this certainly does not mean that it is not critical toward governments.
- The IRU congress took place in Prague simply because the Union has been headquartered there and the Czech government offered considerable support. The IRU leadership has been aware of the government's interest in facilitating the congress—namely, improving its record on the Romani issue. IRU entered into cooperation and partnership with the government not for financial benefit, but the prospect of forging a political partnership. At a later date IRU and the government signed a "Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and the International Romani Union."<sup>19</sup> IRU aims to sign such agreements with other states as well.
- IRU is interested in establishing formal ties with other Romani organizations. For the past decade, cooperation among Romani groups has been chaotic. The time has come to end such chaos.

Speaking in support of IRU's cooperation with the Czech government, another participant pointed out that, not unlike the non-Romani tendency to look to the Roma when searching for a scapegoat, now the Romani leadership is doing just the same thing with respect to the non-Roma—and they have found this scapegoat in the Czechs. Objecting to this state of affairs, he noted that not only the Czech government, but also Denmark, Norway, the United States, and ODIHR/OSCE, contributed to the IRU congress in Prague.

Several participants were impressed with IRU's efforts to conclude bilateral agreements with governments. The naming of Romani organizations in international legal documents and agreements represents a new and promising avenue in Romani politics, they remarked. Indeed, noted one participant, the RNC's call for the European Romani Rights Charter to be a legally binding document goes in the same direction.



## ALTERNATIVE PROJECTS ON ROMANI ISSUES

What, from a Romani perspective, is the most important development in Europe at present? Several participants pointed to EC Directive 2000/43,<sup>20</sup> which requires EU member states and accession countries to adopt a body of anti-discrimination legislation by 2003. They argued that the most promising ray of hope for Roma in Europe nowadays is signified by the human rights and anti-discrimination orientation being maintained within the Romani movement. Further, said some participants, the Roma must adopt a clear and common agenda as regards EU accession. The Romani leadership can set conditions for its support of accession, requiring not only implementation of Directive 2000/43, but also a say in any and all measures that would effectively help stamp out anti-Romani discrimination. What is needed is strong anti-discrimination legislation and similarly strong human rights protection, both for citizens of particular countries and for migrants or refugees.

Contrary to what the IRU representative suggested, the IRU agreement with the Czech government does not include any promised measures to protect Roma from discrimination.<sup>21</sup> One participant remarked that he has been painfully surprised to learn that IRU is looking well into the past for a historical precedent for its bilateral agreement with the government in Prague, and recalls Emperor Sigismund's safe-conduct letters from the XV century. Meanwhile, the IRU representative neglected to mention much more important documents of the recent past; for example, the UN Commission on Human Rights' Resolution 65/1992 on the Protection of Roma/Gypsies.

IRU's main contender at the international level, the RNC, sees things in a similar light. According to its representative, while many doors have been opened in Europe to the Roma, the most important one remains that of EC Directive 2000/43. The Romani leadership must come up with practical steps to ensure that it can participate in its implementation. The other challenge is accession more broadly; for as of now, the Roma are not exactly active players in this process. The EC's Agenda 2000 specifies improvement in the situation of the Roma among the political criteria for accession. The Romani leadership has failed to ensure that Romani representatives are present at accession talks concerning the Roma.

The RNC representative objected to the idea of having a single Romani

organization recognized as representing all Roma. Also, he considered it useful to have elected Romani representation in the international arena, but not at the national level. As this participant underlined, the RNC approach has been to act locally and internationally; locally, because that is the level at which Romani problems can be solved, and internationally, to exert pressure on governments. At the national level the RNC functions as a watchdog organization, keeping its distance from the state power structure. According to him, the current trend in Europe-wide politics pertaining to the Roma, and such politics in individual European states, is to maintain the status quo—that is, to keep the Roma where they are and prevent their migration across national borders. Many Romani organizations have been instrumental in implementing this policy, he said. Supported financially by governments, these organizations invariably become corrupt; IRU is just such a case, he claimed.

This participant went on to say that the RNC represents a different type of organization, a network of independent, self-sustaining, and local or regional organizations—a structure that can resist efforts by state authorities to fragment or corrupt it. It empowers local Romani communities and its leaders in handling their own problems. This RNC representative also expressed concern over another fundamental issue: the mechanism of control a Romani constituency can exercise over those who would represent it. For the time being, he said, the Romani people exercise virtually no control over their leadership. In general, this participant concluded, it is premature to come up with a well-defined formula for Romani political representation. What is at stake is the task of building an effective structure of representation within a highly diverse Romani milieu—and this requires a far larger debate.

## CONCLUSION

As PER's Krakow seminar demonstrated, Roma themselves have much welcomed their internal debate on the issue of leadership. Seminar participants agreed that progress cannot be achieved without self-reflection and a critical assessment of past experience and of the actual state of affairs of their community's leadership. Subjecting the issue to thorough analysis serves to formulate answers to such questions as: Who is a legitimate Romani representative? What is the basis of his or her legitimacy? The PER-organized Krakow meeting provided this opportunity.

The debate revealed the following:

- The Romani leadership has little choice but to adapt itself to modern society by following democratic principles and learning how to operate in mainstream politics. The key challenges the leadership presently faces are the observance of democratic rules and procedures, the development of adequate, stable, and well-functioning organizational structures for its political representation, and enhancing the performance of the individual leaders;
- The modern leadership is becoming increasingly diverse, representing a plethora of Romani NGOs and constituencies of Romani political organizations and parties. In general, organizations in the civic sector outnumber those with political agendas and attract the most educated Romani elites. Among political organizations or parties there are but few that have stable and well-defined structures and that attract a larger Romani constituency. Nonetheless, numerous self-appointed NGO leaders have effectively assumed representation roles on the premise that they have contributed to the establishment of “Romani politics,” while a few elected leaders and representatives enjoy legitimacy, but are less vocal as political players;
- Non-traditional leaders are criticized for being only “service providers,” for losing touch with their Romani communities, putting self-interest first, and “selling out” to the non-Roma. The disapproving voices also charged Romani leaders with pursuing their activities with minimal coordination among themselves, without acknowledging the work and achievements of others, and for generally lacking specialization in any particular field but instead presenting themselves as experts on all Romani-related issues;
- A “good leader” should be well educated, skilled, know *Gadje* ways, responsible to the Romani constituency, oriented toward the Roma and their interests, and pursue his activities with transparency and in line with democratic procedures.
- Most of the present-day Romani leadership is said to be largely following the lead of non-Roma; reacting to events rather than anticipating them and coming up with their own initiatives. Seminar participants agreed that there is still much room for improvement in communication among leaders, for the appreciation of “good examples” set by others, which could serve as a basis for progressive

action. All too often the Romani leadership reinvents the wheel, failing to learn from already accumulated expertise and experience.

- The Romani leadership lacks a clear vision, suggested the comments. Roma are divided over the question of what the community’s prime interest is or should be—combating discrimination, social advancement, or building nationhood? It is crucial that the leadership learn from the past decade and design a new vision, or strategy. Nearly all seminar participants agreed that the leadership must do more to enter mainstream politics. Opinions differed, however, on how to accomplish this: to further develop the Romani civic sector or to form Romani parties.
- Doubts were expressed about how the Romani civic sector functions and in whose interests, the Romani or non-Romani. It is time, however, to reevaluate the relationship between the civic sector and Romani parties and to precisely define the role of the latter in establishing stronger political representation. Calls have been made for Romani activists to return to Romani political organizations as the most viable way for the community to achieve a stronger role within mainstream society and politics.
- Most participants said there is a great need for larger numbers of democratically elected Romani representatives. While some people have already run successfully, whether on the tickets of majority parties or Romani parties, their performance received mixed marks from those at the Krakow meeting. Some seminar attendees were concerned that elected representatives invariably face pressure to follow non-Romani interests and are exposed to corruption or oppression. While there is no alternative but to learn and apply *Gadje* ways, they said, Romani leaders must not overlook their community’s core values. As most participants saw it, the foremost question is how to hold Romani representatives responsible to their constituency, which is predominantly uneducated and subject to manipulation.
- Participants differed over the question of whether the Romani community has any effective political representation at present. Some said no, and remarked that the Romani leadership lacks clear ideas on how to achieve this. As some pointed out, over the past decade the Roma have failed to establish a corps of political representatives that would be widely recognized by non-Roma as a viable unit of

negotiating partners at the highest political level. Efforts to build “umbrella” organization structures, both at national and international levels, were usually short-lived and unproductive.

- In the eyes of some participants, the past ten years, or even the past thirty, represent lost opportunities to the Roma; for the community has failed to establish well-functioning structures of representation either nationally or internationally. People tend to coalesce around stable structures, institutions, or ideologies, but in the case of the Roma these structures are absent. For the moment, although all leaders claim to be advocates of Romani interests, they do not speak with a unified voice. Achieving such representation is not only a question of need but of the right timing, since Romani issues have become a political factor in present-day Europe. The Roma do have well-trained NGO activists, but they lack strong political representation.
- Representatives of the International Romani Union have brought a radically different perspective to the debate on Romani representation. IRU has made it clear that this is all about representing the Romani *nation*. And so it has been working to see that a new legal status is granted to the Roma—that of a nation without a state. IRU has claimed to represent this Romani nation and, as such, has asserted its right to negotiate with governments and international organizations. It has offered a vision and ideology that, it says, will unite the Romani people. Its supporters contend that it observes democratic principles and has been building institutions that will strengthen Romani nationhood.
- Notwithstanding IRU’s averred lack of a nationalist agenda, many participants saw just such an agenda ingrained in the IRU call for Romani nationhood and in the group’s rhetoric. They argue that the European Council’s Directive 2000/43 is a more promising avenue to proceed along; that the Roma must adopt a clear, unified agenda on EU enlargement policies and press for strong anti-discrimination and pro human rights legislation for all members of their community.
- Finally, participants agreed that internal Romani debates at the leadership level such as PER’s Krakow meeting should be held regularly. Participants would like PER to facilitate regular meetings aimed at developing a new vision—one by which the Roma can proceed to work in the interest of their community.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The Romani leadership in fact failed to secure the right to handle the Holocaust funds; the International Organization on Migration (IOM), a non-Romani IGO, has been given this mandate. The IOM is known among Roma for its controversial action of “voluntary return” or deportation for unsuccessful Romani asylum-seekers.
- <sup>2</sup> Some scholars consider improvement in this sphere a basic matter for having the Romani demands taken seriously by governments, for more see Zoltan Barany, “Grim Realities in Eastern Europe,” *Transition*, March 29, 1995, pp. 3-8.
- <sup>3</sup> Some non-Romani analysts advocate such an approach as well. For an example see Jean Pierre Liegeois, “Food for thought,” *Interface*, Autumn 2000, No. 38, p. 2. As this author claims, “This diversity is a sign of dynamism and a reflection of a pluralist society and should be accepted as such, rather than, as is usually the case, serving as a pretext for not treating them seriously (on the grounds that they are not ‘united’).”
- <sup>4</sup> The two Romani analysts, Andrzej Mirga and Nicolae Gheorghe recall the idea of a “mosaic” type of Romani culture and society and the concept of a “collage” as resembling the Romani movement; for more see *The Roma in the Twenty-First Century: A Policy Paper*, Project on Ethnic Relations, Princeton, NJ, May 1997, pp. 33-36.
- <sup>5</sup> See for example, the “Guiding principles for improving the situation of Roma based on the recommendations of the Council of Europe’s Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies and on the recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities,” adopted by the Working Group of the European Council for Enlargement (COECEN Group) at the European Union Tampere Summit, in December 1999. See also the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) General Recommendation XXVII, August 16, 2000. This was the first-ever general recommendation dedicated to a specific ethnic group, the Roma, that includes a number of points on political participation of Roma and its representation.
- <sup>6</sup> In a number of states such bodies in which Romani leadership can participate in decision-making already function; for more information see “Synthesis of the replies to the questionnaire on participation of minorities in decision-making processes,” Council of Europe DH-MIN (99), Strasbourg, March 4, 1999.
- <sup>7</sup> Romani and non-Romani analysts paid no attention to this issue.
- <sup>8</sup> For more on this topic see the PER Report, *Roma in the Twenty-First Century: A Policy Paper*, op. cit., pp. 18-22.
- <sup>9</sup> The declaration was adopted on July 27, 2000; in its Czech language version it is titled “Deklarace Naroda. My, Romský Narod.” (Declaration of a Nation. We, the Roma Nation). In its English version a different title appeared - “We, the Roma Nation, Have a Dream.”
- <sup>10</sup> Op.cit.
- <sup>11</sup> Op.cit.
- <sup>12</sup> R. E. Koulis, “What Roma Want Survey: Roma Civic Attitudes in Hungary,” in *The*

*Roma in Society, the CEU Nationalism Studies*, January 2001. Post-Graduate Course 02.29 - 03.26 2001, [A collection of reading materials], produces interesting findings on the Romani minority self-government in Hungary. The author claims for example, "That the Roma want to be more involved (in civic life) should come as no great surprise. What is surprising is that civic institutions such as local governments, Romani MSGs (minority self-governments) and NGOs are incapable of providing the Roma with effective access to public life." Op. cit. p. 8.

- <sup>13</sup> The IRU Declaration was presented to the U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, at his meeting with Emil Scuka, the President of IRU in New York on June 5, 2001. On the same day IRU held a press conference at U.N. headquarters; CNN International (Global Channel) issued the interview with Paolo Pietrosanti, the Commissioner for Foreign Affairs of IRU, on June 9, 2001. In addition to the attention from the number of articles covering this event that appeared in newspapers worldwide, IRU successfully managed to obtain support and place its request in the final statement of participants in the meeting of NGOs from Eastern and Central Europe, in Warsaw on November 15-18, 2000, addressed to the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) to be held in Durban, South Africa, August 31-September 7, 2001. In point 5 of this statement, participants recommended that "...the U.N. confers the status of a non-territorial nation to the Romani people, providing for adequate representation in relevant international governmental organizations. The Roma should, *inter alia*, receive a seat in the United Nations, participate as elected officials in the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and in the constitutive organs of these organizations." For more, see "World conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance," in *Roma Rights, Quarterly Journal of the European Roma Rights Center*, No. 4, 2000, pp. 67-69.
- <sup>14</sup> "Report on the Condition of the Roma in Europe," report commissioned by the OSCE for presentation, October, 2000, (prepared by rapporteur Rudko Kawczynski, RNC), OSCE Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 2000, No. 166, pp. 20-26.
- <sup>15</sup> How different from the IRU declaration's wording is the following statement? "You are a truly European people as by definition and tradition, Gypsies are nomads, traveling from country to country and without really recognizing frontiers in Europe. You are at home in the Council of Europe because for centuries you have already been Europeans." This is a fragment of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mrs. Catherine Lalumiere's statement issued at the hearing "The Gypsy people and Europe", in Strasbourg, July 1991. This is not legal language, but rather political—metaphoric and descriptive.
- <sup>16</sup> The Czech government's support of the IRU project has been far from unanimous, as might be proven by the statement of Roman Kristof, Executive Vice Chairman of the Inter-ministerial Commission for Roma Community Affairs, at the seminar "The migration of the Roma as a contemporary phenomenon," organized during the Khamoro Festival in Prague, May 22-25, 2001. In his speech he pointed to some basic dilemmas IRU's request brings, namely, the issue of sovereignty of a non-territorial subject. IRU requests recognition as "...a nation which, while non-territorial, is political and sovereign in expressing its will." How therefore, can such a nation "...act in a sovereign way when

these acts necessarily take place in the territory of those, who are themselves sovereign?" According to him there is no precedent in history for being sovereign and having no territory. Efforts to have legally defined the status of those who belong to and represent the non-territorial, political nation "...would be a somersault which could only be managed by legal contortionists. But the land of Bohemia has always been a paradise of ropewalkers." See also Eva Sobotka's criticism of the IRU Declaration and the "Concept of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs towards the Romani issue," in E. Sobotka, "They have a dream. The state of Roma affairs in the Czech Republic," *Central European Review*, Vol 3, No 18, May 21, 2001. As this author claims "The national interests of the Czech Republic are visible in the proposed concept. Reducing and shifting the criticism of the situation of Roma from human rights rhetoric to a more vague political platform, not embodied in any internationally binding documents, could be potentially harming (sic.) for the Romani nation."

- <sup>17</sup> This speaker considered seeking strong human rights protection and guarantees of it as a priority of Romani politics. Full elaboration of his arguments can be found in N. Gheorghe and Thomas Acton, "Dealing with Multiculturalism: Minority, Ethnic, National and Human Rights," *OSCE ODIHR Bulletin*, v. 3. No.1, Warsaw, 1994/95.
- <sup>18</sup> The IRU leadership has been under the influence of the European Transnational Radical Party's ideology and its imprint can be seen in the text of the IRU Declaration, especially in those paragraphs that refer to state and individual rights. For example: "... we do not want a State today, when the new society and new economy are concretely and progressively crossing-over the importance and adequacy of the State as the way how (sic.) individuals organize themselves," or "We do know that a shy (sic.) debate regarding the adequacy of the state to the changing needs of global society—a global society which should not be organized exclusively from above ...," or, "A transnational Nation as the Roma one needs a transnational rule of law, this is evident; we do believe that such a need is shared by any individual, independently of the nation he or she belongs to."
- <sup>19</sup> At the time of the Krakow meeting this document had not yet been concluded; both parties signed it on April 4, 2001.
- <sup>20</sup> Council Directive 2000/43/EC of June 29, 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.
- <sup>21</sup> The Memorandum primarily elevates the IRU organization representing the Romani nation as the major agent in international relations and the Ministry is promising to support it at this level. The whole document consists of a preamble, 6 articles and an annex. Article 4 states, "Partnership between the MFA and IRU relies both on the attractiveness of the IRU political vision, based on the rejection of violence and on a cooperative approach to the non-Roma world, and on IRU as a representative organization defending Roma (sic.) interests on an international scale. The MFA and IRU at the same time agree that putting this vision into life (sic.) depends to a considerable degree on the unity of the international Roma (sic.) movement ...." Article 5 states, "The MFA and IRU share the conviction that the way of achieving genuine progress in resolving Roma (sic.) issues on the European continent rests in the implementation of an all-European approach to this problem; the MFA and IRU shall work together in fostering the all-European approach to the Roma (sic.) issues."

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

- Dragoljub Ackovic**, President, Roma Congress Party,  
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
- Andrasz Adam**, President, Roma Cultural Center, Tarnow, Poland
- Petar Antic**, Humanitarian Law Center, Federal Republic of  
Yugoslavia
- Nicoleta Bitu**, Romani CRISS, Romania
- Nadezhda Demeter**, Senior Researcher, Institute of Ethnography and  
Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Russian Federation
- Orhan Galjus**, Program Manager, Open Society Institute,  
Network Media Program – Roma Media Fund, Hungary
- Nicolae Gheorghe**, Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues,  
ODIHR/OSCE
- Ondrej Gina**, President, Fund of Hope and Understanding,  
Czech Republic
- Salome Hirvaskoski**, Assistant on Roma and Sinti Issues,  
ODIHR/OSCE
- Rudko Kawczynski**, Member of the Board of Directors,  
Roma National Congress, Germany
- Nikolay Kirilov**, Director, Roma-Lom Foundation, Bulgaria;  
Director, Pakiv European Roma Fund, Hungary
- Vilmos Kovesi**, Patyivale Rom NGO, Hungary
- Andrzej Mirga**, Chair, PER Romani Advisory Council; Co-Chair,  
Council of Europe Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies, Poland
- Klara Orgovanova**, Program Director, Open Society Institute;  
Executive Director, InfoRoma Foundation, Slovak Republic
- Livia Plaks**, Executive Director, Project on Ethnic Relations, USA
- Gheorghe Raducanu**, Adviser on Minorities' Issues,  
Romanian Presidency
- Emil Scuka**, President, International Romani Union, Czech Republic
- Gyula Vamosi**, Consultant, Open Society Institute, Roma Regional  
Participation Program; Interpreter, Hungary

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