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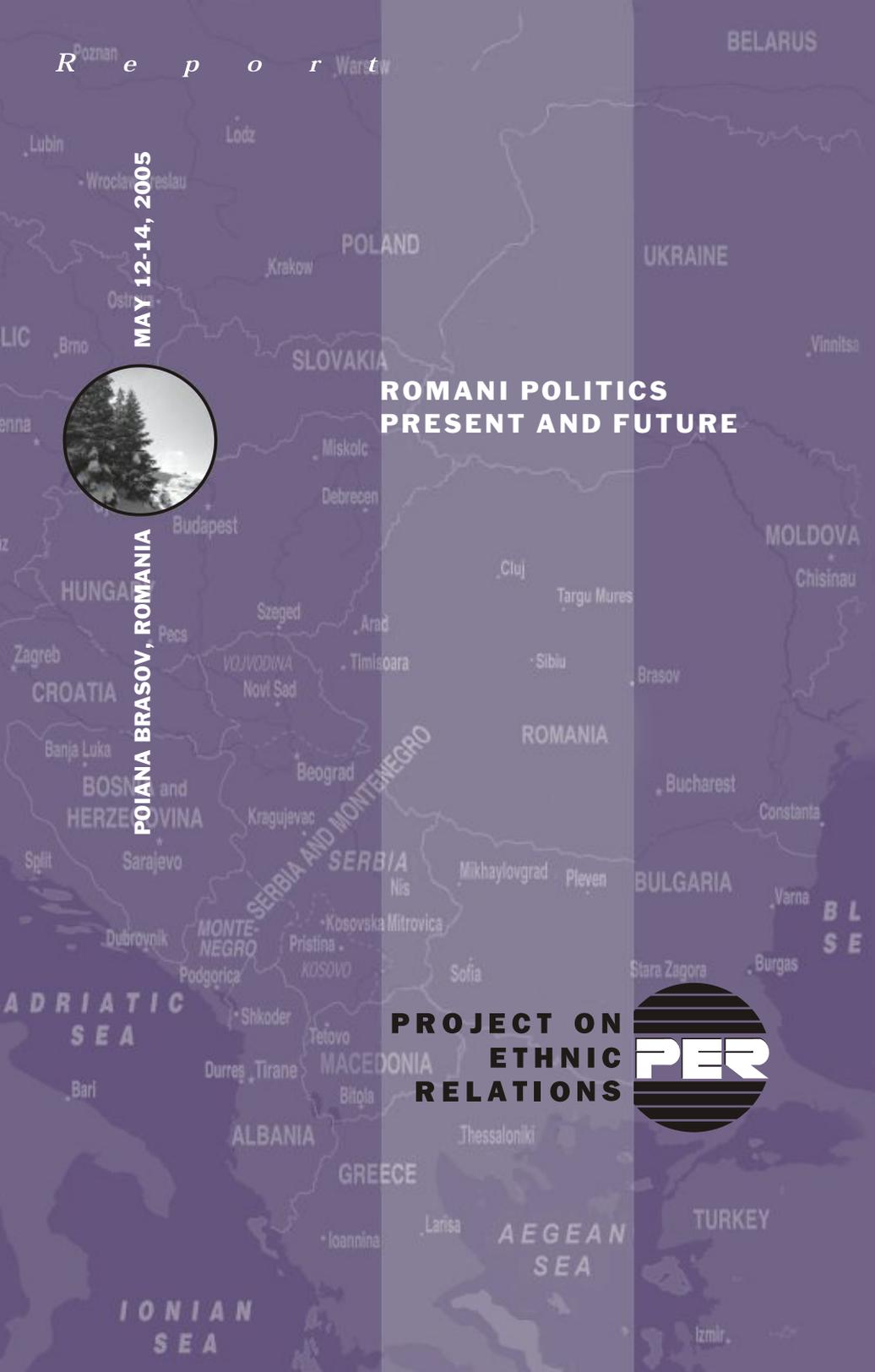
MAY 12-14, 2005



# ROMANI POLITICS PRESENT AND FUTURE

POIANA BRASOV, ROMANIA

PROJECT ON  
ETHNIC  
RELATIONS





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PRESENT AND FUTURE**

**Poiana Brasov, Romania**

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## PREFACE

The Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) has been involved in Romani issues since organizing its groundbreaking roundtable meetings between Roma and government officials in Stupava, Czechoslovakia in 1992, and Snagov, Romania in 1993. These were the first encounters of their kind, and they have been credited as being the beginning of the international effort to create a long-term agenda on the Roma for governments and for Romani organizations.

Since the Stupava and Snagov roundtables, PER has engaged questions related to the situation of the Roma on a range of different fronts. We have convened international discussions on Roma policy both in the region and in Brussels, worked closely with national governments to develop state strategies on Roma and improve their implementation, and addressed such local-level concerns as the education of Romani children, biased and racist coverage of Roma in the media, and the problems of Romani refugees and IDPs, through pro-



From left to right: Nicolae Gheorghe, Advisor on Roma and Sinti Issues of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Nicoleta Bitu, Regional Programs Coordinator for Romani Criss (Romania), Miranda Vuolasranta, Special Advisor on Roma Related Issues of the Council of Europe, Nicolae Paun, President of the Roma Social Democratic Party (Romania), Adrian Severin, Member of the Board of the PER Regional Center, Livia Plaks, President of the Project on Ethnic Relations, Andrzej Mirga, Director for Roma Programs of the Project on Ethnic Relations, Rudko Kawczynski, President *ad interim* of the European Roma and Travelers Forum, Ilie Dinca, President of the Romanian National Agency for the Roma, Ivan Vesely, Chair of Dzeno Association (Czech Republic), Klara Orgovanova, Plenipotentiary of the National Romani Community (Slovak Republic), Mabera Kamberi, Assistant Minister of Labor and Social Policy of Macedonia, Nezdet Mustafa, President of the United Party of the Roma of Macedonia, Jozsef Bogdan, Member of the National Roma Self-Government (Hungary), Karoly Sarkozi, Member of the National Roma Self-Government (Hungary).

grams of training, workshops, and the exchange of positive experiences between localities facing similar challenges. PER has also served as a mediator between Romani leaders and non-Romani government authorities in a number of crisis situations.

While taking a complex approach to the problems of Europe's diverse Romani communities, PER bases much of its work in this area on the notion that the best long-term solution for Roma will be one that provides for their greater inclusion in the political life and decision-making institutions of their home countries. Only in this way, PER believes, will Roma gain the opportunity to define their own agendas, and to influence the policies that most directly affect them.

Continuing its emphasis on the primary role of Roma themselves as actors in setting Roma policy, PER organized a closed discussion for leaders of the European Romani movement in Poiana Brasov, Romania in May 2005. The purpose of this roundtable was to give these leaders a chance to discuss, behind closed doors, the current challenges facing their community, and come to an agreement on what their strategies and priorities for the future should be.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Romanian Government's Department of Interethnic Relations for the ongoing support it has provided to PER's Regional Center for Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. We also warmly thank all the participants in the Poiana Brasov roundtable for their willingness to openly and constructively debate the many challenging issues we set before them.

The Poiana Brasov roundtable was organized by the staff of PER's Regional Center in Bucharest and Tirgu Mures, Romania, and was chaired by Andrzej Mirga, PER's Director for Roma Programs, who is also the author of this report. Alan Moseley, PER Program Officer in Princeton, was the report's editor. PER assumes full responsibility for the text of this report, which has not been reviewed by the participants. In keeping with PER's usual practice, and to encourage frank discussion, all comments are provided without attribution.

**Livia Plaks**, *President*

Princeton, New Jersey  
April 2006

## INTRODUCTION

On May 13-14, 2005 a group of Romani leaders and activists from countries of Central and Eastern Europe gathered in Poiana Brasov, Romania, to hold the third in a series of intra-Romani discussions organized by the Project on Ethnic Relations. Two earlier PER-organized roundtables took on the contentious questions of Romani leadership, representation, and the status of Roma (the Krakow meeting),<sup>1</sup> and the issue of self-determination of Romani minorities (the Jadwisin meeting).<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the Poiana Brasov roundtable was to review, critically analyze, and articulate a clear picture of the current stage of Roma policy in Europe. An additional objective was to formulate common goals and future priorities for Romani leaders and activists based on an assessment of current developments and achievements. The participants debated a number of the most urgent questions for Roma policymaking, including the effectiveness of programs targeting Roma, the role of Romani actors in these programs, and the possibility of attaining more coherence in policies and action aimed at improving the plight of Romani minorities across Europe.

The starting point for the roundtable was the notion that there is a developing field of Roma-related policy, at both the national and international levels, which is reflected in the growing body of programs, recommendations, and declarations concerning Roma. Yet, after more than a decade of various policies and programs, the situation of the Roma has not visibly changed. A lack of political will on the part of governments is often cited as the main reason for this failure. According to this argument, governmental Roma-related policies are viewed as "window-dressing," designed to mitigate the criticism of the international community, and not produced as an outcome of the Roma's own political struggle to promote and realize their interests. If this explanation has any merit, it prompts a series of questions related to the intersection of Roma and politics. Realizing Roma policy undoubtedly requires firm political will, especially when decisions implicate the state budget. Are the Roma in a position to influence such decisions? How can this be done? Do Roma need to engage in politics and be part of the political process to pursue their interests in an effective way? What is the role of Romani political and civic organizations? Are there any lessons to learn from other, politically stronger and better organized national minorities? What is the role of interna-

tional organizations and European Roma policy in promoting Romani interests and in supporting their realization at national and local levels? These questions were not entirely new, but the organizers of this roundtable believed Roma needed to be confronted with them once again since they appear to be central to the future of Roma and Roma policy.

In her opening remarks, the president of PER observed that many of those who came to Poiana Brasov have attained positions with national and international organizations, and have a role in influencing the fate of Roma. PER, she added, has contributed to this state of affairs, being among the first organizations to create opportunities for Roma to speak for themselves.<sup>3</sup> The few Romani leaders, who, in the early 1990s, made the case for their people to be given the same opportunities and rights as others, did a remarkable job, she said. Today the Roma are on the agenda of all international organizations and national governments in Europe. The visibility that has been brought to Romani issues, however, has not yet resulted in measurable improvements on the ground. Many efforts of the last decade—whether commitments of the international community or of national governments—had minimal impact on the overall situation of Roma. There has often been a lack of coherence in policies and action, poor coordination, and the absence of a common vision for how to address Romani issues. The emerging and growing Romani movement has contributed to this problem as well, as its leaders are often involved in competing initiatives or are even in competition with each other for greater influence.

The PER president noted that PER has always encouraged partnerships and cooperation between governments and the leaderships of ethnic minorities. What is still needed, however, is a concerted effort between governments and Romani leaders, and a joint vision of the future of the Roma that would bring real change to the daily lives of Romani communities, she said. The Poiana Brasov roundtable was an effort to stimulate a debate that could lead to the articulation of such a vision.

In his opening remarks, a member of the Board of the PER Regional Center pointed to the far-reaching implications of being without a Romani "kin-state" in Europe. Not having such a state causes a number of vulnerabilities for Romani minorities, he said. On the one

hand, the Roma cannot count on the political or material support of a kin-state and, as a minority, are thus always dependent on the good will of the majority. At the same time, the Roma's vulnerability is caused by their historic and ongoing marginalization and exclusion in society. This kind of vulnerability, while legitimizing the Roma's demands for state assistance and support, might also lead Roma to assume attitudes of victimization and dependency. The Romani movement thus faces a particular challenge: to transform the Roma's vulnerability into an opportunity. Achieving this would require better internal organization of Romani minorities to be able to voice their concerns and needs in a coherent way, and to promote Roma-related policy objectives. It would also require engaging the international community, which should play a more prominent role vis-à-vis Romani minorities in the absence of a Romani kin-state.

These remarks established the conceptual framework for the round-table discussion, that is, the particular position of the Romani community in relation to the state and the international community. Both have a role in determining Romani politics and in enacting Roma-related policies. First, there are tasks and obligations that only states can fulfill, originating from the constitutional rights of Roma as citizens and as legitimate ethnic minorities in their countries of residence. There are also interests and concerns related to Romani minorities that go beyond particular states, such as issues of human rights violations, discrimination, migration, refugees or asylum-seekers, and social and economic marginalization and exclusion. These matters are the subject of emerging European Union policy toward the Roma.

The discussion in Poiana Brasov revealed that the Romani participants were conscious of the fact that they play a role in Roma policy-making as active subjects. At the same time, however, they were also aware of their limitations in determining outcomes. The major challenge they face is making Roma real and indispensable stakeholders in the formulation of Roma policy, at both national and international levels. To achieve this, the Romani elite must learn to anticipate developments and must be in a position to lead, and not only to follow other actors. While some participants held the opinion that Roma have not been in charge of Roma policymaking, others saw new opportunities for gaining greater control in this area. The political mobilization of Romani minorities at the national level and the establishment of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), a new

international Romani NGO with special relations with the Council of Europe, were seen as ways of claiming a more prominent role for Roma in shaping Roma policy.

## PART I: BACKGROUND

### ROMA IN NATIONAL POLITICS: CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

In the past, Roma policy was determined by governments themselves, without much consideration for the Roma's own views. Roma were not among decision makers, and they did not participate in policy-making as actors. Governmental policies on Roma can be differentiated between historical policies of exclusion, discrimination, and forced assimilation, and current policies of integration and the protection of human and minority rights.<sup>5</sup> Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, and due to new opportunities brought by democratization in the former communist countries, the Roma have made numerous attempts to enter national-level politics. At the same time, Romani issues have appeared on the agendas of important international organizations (and, subsequently, of governmental bodies), but in new terms. The efforts of international organizations at addressing Romani concerns have forced national governments to see Romani minorities as necessary partners in deliberations on policies related to them, following the now often heard slogan "for Roma by Roma."

Roma are entitled to exercise their constitutional rights as citizens as well as human rights as an ethnic minority. The extent to which they are able to exercise these rights, however, depends on many factors, many of which work to their disadvantage. A low social and economic status, low levels of civic education, the lack of an educated elite, and stigmas associated with the Romani ethnic identity all present barriers to fully exercising constitutional and human rights. As a result of these factors, Roma are grossly underrepresented both in elected bodies and in public offices. The Romani political parties that are quite numerous in the region are, as a rule, weak, badly organized and unsuccessful in mobilizing their Romani constituencies. Presently, Roma have managed to attain a small degree of parliamentary representation in only a few countries of the region (Hungary has four Romani members of parliament, Romania has one, Macedonia has one, and Bulgaria has one). Even this, however, is mainly through mainstream party lists, as in Hungary and Bulgaria, or through coalitions with mainstream parties, as in Romania and Macedonia. In

Romania, Roma benefit along with other minorities from reserved minority seats in parliament. Roma generally fare better in local elections, especially in countries with significant Romani populations such as Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria, but also in Macedonia, where there is a Romani municipality inside the capital city of Skopje.

The current European standards for protecting minority rights provide Romani minorities with new opportunities to participate in decision making. These standards are inscribed in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), which introduces a so-called "third generation" or "third tier" of minority rights.<sup>6</sup> In Article 15, the FCNM requests that parties to the convention establish necessary conditions for "the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them." Article 4, point 2 of the FCNM requires state parties to "adopt, where necessary, adequate measures in order to promote, in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, full and effective equality...In this respect, they shall take due account of the specific conditions of the persons belonging to national minorities." This article provides space for affirmative governmental measures toward a minority, which, due to "specific conditions," might be at a disadvantage, as is the case with Romani minorities in Europe at large. The FCNM however, leaves state parties a large margin of discretion in implementing these provisions.

The development of governmental strategies or comprehensive programs for Roma has been recommended by a number of international organizations and institutions. Such programs are also part and parcel of the so-called "minority conditionality" for European Union membership contained in the Copenhagen political criteria. More than 20 European countries have come up with Roma strategies since the mid-1990s. These strategies are government documents, usually adopted as decrees, embedded in existing laws and implemented through a set of concrete measures by government institutions specifically mandated with this task. (In contrast, the World Bank and Open Society Institute's Decade of Roma Inclusion initiative is designed as a regional project to which some governments have subscribed.<sup>7</sup> In most states that are party to the latter initiative, the existing Roma

strategies provide a framework that is complemented by the Decade of Roma Inclusion Action Plans.)

The Roma have benefited from the adoption of Roma strategies or policies in many ways. Among the most visible and important of these was the inclusion of Roma with significant responsibilities in the staff of government agencies. In some countries the implementation of Roma strategies was assigned to a particular ministry or a department within a single ministry (as in, for example, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in Macedonia, or the National Minorities Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Administration in Poland). In other countries a new structure was established (such as the Roma Office in Hungary, the governmental Roma Agency in Romania, or the Plenipotentiary for Roma Issues in Slovakia). In the latter examples the heads of these structures are Roma themselves. Another approach is the practice of employing Roma as advisors or experts within various ministries, as in Hungary, in regional authorities or specialized bodies such as ombudsmen's offices, as in the Czech Republic, or in city halls, as in Romania.

Romani organizations and representatives are also part of "consultation" mechanisms in many states. Such mechanisms can be general, for all minorities (variously named committees or commissions on minority or interethnic issues), or specific, established for consulting only on Romani issues (the second is the practice in Finland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland). Creating Romani minority councils (as in Serbia and Croatia) or minority self-government (as in Hungary) are other ways of enabling Roma to participate in decision-making. Both are set up at the national level, according to provisions of the states' minority laws. Romani councils, just as councils of other minorities, are considered legitimate partners for state authorities. In general, establishing specific structures or institutions for resolving Romani issues aims at empowering Roma and providing them with a sense of sharing in decision-making processes. However, these structures give rise to a number of questions, including, how do those who work in such public offices evaluate existing practices and their effectiveness? Do they have the strength to influence Roma policy outcomes and implementation?

## ROMA POLICY AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: SHIFTING CENTERS OF GRAVITY?

The involvement of international organizations in Roma-related issues has evolved since the mid-1990s. In general, however, the response of major international organizations, whether inter-governmental or nongovernmental, to the challenge of the Roma's plight, was either a "rights-based" approach, prioritizing human and minority rights, or an effort to achieve "socio-economic integration."<sup>8</sup> Over time, particular bodies within larger organizations like the OSCE and the Council of Europe were established to address Romani concerns.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, a similar interest in Roma appeared in other organizations, such as, recently, the World Bank. Some of these have come up with new initiatives designed to have a potentially definitive and long-term impact on Roma, as in case of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, or Finish President Tarja Halonen's idea to set up a pan-European representative organization of Romani minorities at the Council of Europe—the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF).<sup>10</sup>

The dynamics of developing Roma-related policies seem to point to a shift in what can be named the "center of gravity" for Roma policy making. The Council of Europe and the OSCE were at various times the central actors in addressing Romani issues, and they remain on the scene as important players. While important, their efforts have not produced immediate results in terms of changing the situation of Romani communities, and in fact this was not their aim. They have developed numerous non-binding recommendations as policy guidelines on Roma for governments, and to some extent they have served this purpose well.

With European Union enlargement and the requirements of the Copenhagen political criteria for aspiring new members, the center of gravity for Romani issues has shifted to the European Union and its institutions. A new framework for dealing with Romani issues was created with the EU enlargement process, as the states of Central and Eastern Europe appeared poised to bring large Romani populations into the EU.<sup>11</sup> The "minority conditionality" for EU accession placed the political inclusion of Romani minorities among the political criteria, and spelled out requests for improvement in their social and eco-

conomic standing as well as for better integration within their respective societies. The European Union's pre-accession PHARE support program was also a determining factor in developing national Roma strategies and programs.

Accessing states undertook efforts following the requirements and recommendations of the European Commission, which were included in a number of documents, including the Commission's regular progress reports on EU candidates. In fact, the Roma, along with the Russian minority in Estonia and Latvia, were the only groups mentioned regularly in the EC's monitoring documents.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the expectation of "more direct EU involvement" in the case of Romani minorities has increased, and has been formulated both by Romani representatives<sup>13</sup> and by some governments of the new EU member states.<sup>14</sup>

These expectations were further reinforced when two Romani representatives from Hungary were elected to the European Parliament in 2004: Livia Jaroka, from the European People's Party/European Democrats, and Victoria Mohacsi, from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. Both intend to advance the Romani issue on the EU policy agenda. They were already successful in initiating and effectively managing the adoption of a resolution by the European Parliament on the situation of Roma in April 2005.<sup>15</sup>

The Romani issue is high on the agenda of the EU in its policies on anti-discrimination and equality. In 2004, a working group on Roma was established under the leadership of DG Employment and Equal Opportunities to enhance the coordination within the EU on Romani issues and policies. More importantly, however, EU policies are backed by strong financial instruments. Funds are available to implement Roma-related programs that fall into the EU's general policies, whether these are related to anti-discrimination, social inclusion (Structural Funds and the renewed Lisbon Strategy) or employment (the European Employment Strategy).<sup>16</sup> It is also at the level of the EC that central policy issues are determined, for example whether Roma-related policies will be guided by "mainstreaming" or "targeted" approaches.<sup>17</sup>

The growing interest in Roma-related initiatives in Europe—especially former communist Europe—is indeed a remarkable phenomenon.

International organizations and institutions, governments, and Romani and non-Romani NGOs are all engaged in a plethora of programs and projects with the same objective: to improve the situation of Romani communities across Europe. Each of these actors is pursuing its own politics regarding Roma in accordance with its mandate. Are all these efforts bringing long-term change to Romani minorities? To what extent are Roma players in the formulation of Roma policy? How do they or their elite see their role in these endeavors? Are they a driving force behind them, or are they rather driven by other, stronger actors? These were some of the most important questions taken up at PER's roundtable in Poiana Brasov.

## PART II: THE POIANA BRASOV ROUNDTABLE

### THE ROMANI MOVEMENT AND ROMA POLICYMAKING: A PHASE OF CONFRONTATION?

For some Romani leaders at the roundtable, it was clear that politics is about political power and resources, and that since Roma have neither, they cannot be in charge of Roma policy formulation, which is ultimately determined by powerful actors such as governments. According to one participant from the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), some Roma might believe that they can steer policy outcomes through consultations with decision makers; in fact, he said, Roma are at most the main characters in plays directed by others. In his view, initiatives created for the Roma were established not as a result of the Roma's own efforts, but due to the interest, involvement and support of individual states.

For example, the efforts of the International Romani Union (IRU) after the fifth Roma Congress in 2000 in Prague, were somewhat effective because they were backed by the government of the Czech Republic, as expressed in the Memorandum of Understanding the Czech government signed with the IRU.<sup>18</sup> The Decade of Roma Inclusion was created through the efforts of the Open Society Institute and George Soros, along with the World Bank and the Hungarian government. The Romanian government played a large role in supporting the OSCE's Action Plan for Roma and Sinti. Similarly, it is clear, said this participant, that without the strong involvement of the Finnish foreign ministry in carrying out an initiative of the Finnish president, there would be no European Roma and Travellers Forum. Roma are dependent on states and governments, and without their involvement not much can be achieved, he stated.

This highly provocative statement provoked debate on whether the Romani movement can be independent from states or international organizations, and whether Roma can in fact influence Roma policy. Some participants argued that the Romani movement had greater independence in the beginning of 1990s, when, they said, it had a clear vision of its own agenda. Its activism was guided by a strong anti-discrimination and human rights discourse that strongly con-

fronted and criticized governments. In these years the Romani movement managed effectively to raise awareness of Romani problems and place them on the agendas of various international organizations. Since the late 1990s, however, argued some participants, the movement has been in a state of crisis regarding its vision and goals for the future, and few Romani activists have preserved their independence.

***The Romani movement managed to build up and mobilize a stratum of the educated Romani middle class; however, it did not pursue a similar course among Romani communities at the grass-roots level.***

Another participant asserted that in the last decade the Romani movement managed to build up and mobilize a stratum of the educated Romani middle class; however, it did not pursue a similar course among Romani communities at the grass-roots level. In addition, he claimed, the Romani middle class has been "hijacked" by international organizations, reducing the potential to mount true grass-roots efforts. In the

view of other speakers these Romani activists have lost their independence and become part of "the establishment" or a "*petite bourgeoisie*." They are paid officials who serve their employers or patrons, he said. Such activists are living in rather good conditions, claiming to act in the name of the dispossessed and deprived while remaining distant from them. Somewhere along the way, continued this participant, Roma have lost their sense of serving a common purpose, and Romani leaders have begun looking at each other not as allies, but rather as competitors for better jobs. Roma who have attained a bit of power have internalized a habit of power—intolerance toward Roma who have opposed or criticized them. Being part of one network or initiative often means being an enemy to those connected with another. In this way a new divide between Roma has emerged.

Still, added another participant, many Romani activists operate on the premise that they can deal with everything simply because they are Roma; they pretend to know everything, but in fact they lack specialized expertise. The Romani movement suffers because of weak human resources; there is a shortage of highly skilled and professional personnel. As a result, Romani discourse is often very general, and doesn't reflect the complexity of the Roma's reality. The fact that

Roma are often thought of as a "special" minority, not related to any other, has prevented them from seeking coalitions with other interest groups or minorities in similar situations. Roma have ignored the larger picture in which combined efforts with others would help their cause.

These critical views of the Romani movement were balanced by another set of statements. Many participants argued that Roma must engage in politics if they wish to influence Roma policy formulation, and that many Roma have done just this. A certain level of "intolerance" or competition, according to a participant representing the younger generation of Romani activists, is a normal state of affairs in a community that is being politically mobilized. Individuals, non-governmental organizations and political parties compete with each other over resources, positions and power, and this is something positive. The weakness of the Romani movement stems from the inability of Roma to articulate their own objectives, and from Roma letting others to do their job. There is a need for greater coordination among the Roma and between the Roma and various initiatives set up by international organizations. Achieving some coherence in Roma policy doesn't mean that there must be one policy center or one leading Romani organization, however, or that there is an inherent problem with having multiple initiatives on Roma. Coherence can be reached if such initiatives are guided by interests that coincide with those of Roma. The role of the Romani elite is to define these interests, argued this participant.

For many participants, coordination and coherence in Roma policy was a crucial issue. According to one, most international organizations that have gotten involved in Romani issues, whether the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the European Commission, European Parliament, World Bank, or the Open Society Institute, have come up with their own initiatives and policies. The question is whether and how these initiatives can be integrated into a coherent policy. She expressed concern that while there have been efforts at coordination between various policy cen-

***To gain control over the Roma's destiny, the Romani elite must go through bitter internal debates, self-criticism, and reflection, and must confront new ideas.***

ters or within single organizations, such as at the European Commission, Roma are rarely part of this. Instead, non-Romani experts are invited or hired to debate Romani issues. According to her, Roma have allowed this state of affairs without question.

Efforts at coordination within and between international organizations were viewed by some participants with skepticism. While such efforts were understood to be necessary to avoid duplication of programs, these participants doubted whether such efforts can be successful. The nature of institutions and their bureaucracies, according to these participants, is that people employed to work for them will advocate for implementing projects even at the expense of duplication or overlapping with other actors. In some cases, those who attempt coordination of programs and institutions are at the same time connected to organizations that are in competition for funds. This conflict of interest prevents the coordination from being effective.

The participants discussed how the landscape of Roma-related policy has changed significantly since the beginning of the 1990s. At present, the Romani movement is one among many actors involved in policy formulation and the field is becoming crowded and competitive. Each actor is devising its own initiatives, setting up its own network, and choosing Romani partners. There is some communication between them, but also much competition and duplication of efforts. Even those who are well informed have had difficulty getting a clear picture of recent developments. Some participants in the roundtable expressed a sense of frustration and uncertainty about whether these numerous initiatives served the Romani cause, or were more in the interests of those who enacted them.

Some participants suggested that the Romani movement is beginning a phase of confrontation that it will have to face and pass through. One participant argued the Romani movement has come to a crossroads. To gain control over the Roma's destiny, he said, the Romani elite must go through bitter internal debates, self-criticism, and reflection, and must confront new ideas. The time has come for Roma to make a realistic analysis and assessment of recent developments, and to design a new, more concrete agenda and a short list of goals, he argued. This would also require confronting other actors in the field of Roma policy.

## NATIONAL ROMA POLICY AND ROMANI POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

The chair of the meeting recalled how, in the early 1990s, Romani activists dreamt of becoming significant actors in national politics. They believed that in order to achieve positive outcomes, Roma need to become stakeholders in national politics and increase their political influence at all levels. At present, Roma are interested in joining political processes through parties, elections, and advocacy networks. However, they are still divided over the best strategy for entering politics. How a politically (and especially economically) weak minority can mobilize its constituency and gain political standing in national or local politics remains a challenging issue. Romani participation in elected bodies and governments is increasing, though Roma are still heavily underrepresented in governing institutions, he reported. The question of whether the few Roma in positions of power have a real impact on policy outcomes remains open to debate.

During the roundtable there was a noticeable difference between how participants representing political organizations and how those in the civil sector evaluated the role and influence of Romani political leaders. While Romani MPs and state officials were aware of their limited ability to influence Roma policy formulation and implementation, they nevertheless believed it was necessary to use the opportunities offered by public office. These participants argued in favor of stronger political mobilization among Romani communities as the best way to gain direct access to policy makers and to positions of power. Furthermore, they also asserted that the Romani civil sector is becoming increasingly exhausted and stagnant in its focus on small projects, which benefit only a few. For their part, representatives of the Romani civil sector were critical of the performance of political leaders, and blamed them for misusing their opportunities and failing to produce positive policy outcomes.

The general elections in Romania and municipal elections in Macedonia were brought up to illustrate the failure of the Romani political leadership. In the view of some at the roundtable, both cases raise the question of whether Romani political parties are able to make adequate political calculations and choices to bring them success.

Responding to these questions, a representative of a Romani party from Romania acknowledged that, indeed, in 2000 his party chose to sign a protocol with the Social Democratic Party (PSD), and entered into coalition with a ruling party. In recent elections PSD lost, and his party, as its partner, lost some of its political capital as well. In the view of this participant, however, the Romani party did not miscalculate on its election or campaign strategy. His party lost, explained this participant, because in the fall of 2004 an alliance of ten Romani organizations was formed to run against it in elections, which caused confusion among Romani voters. However, he went on, the number of votes lost was not very significant: in the 2000 election the Roma Party (RP) received approximately 75,000 votes, and in 2004, 63,000 votes. Party politics, he said, is like a soccer game: if you have a good team, you may win; if the team is unprofessional, you can participate in games and lose every time. Roma have never been close to passing the electoral threshold of 5%; that is, receiving more than 500,000 votes, which would make it possible to form a parliamentary group, as the Hungarians do all the time. Any calculations for how to form a Romani parliamentary group are therefore unrealistic, he said.

***How a politically (and especially economically) weak minority can mobilize its constituency and gain political standing in national or local politics remains a challenging issue.***

Further, continued this participant, Romanian election legislation is not helpful in this regard. It creates confusion among voters by allowing both political parties and civic associations (NGOs) to participate in elections. Changing the electoral law would help Romani organizations and voters make better choices, he said. According to this speaker, however, there will

be no organization to challenge the Roma Party in the next elections. Regarding other large minorities, such as the Hungarians, this speaker acknowledged that the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) did a lot of good things for minorities in general, and that the Roma Party has cooperative relations with it. He reminded other participants, however, that the two parties are different entities with different strengths and goals.

According to this speaker, the RP was consistent in its pursuit of sev-

eral objectives throughout the last 15 years. These objectives included: the civic and electoral education of Roma; increasing the participation of Roma in local-level decision making (Romani councilors); building institutions and ensuring the representation of Roma in public administration; and protecting Romani culture, language and traditions. In all these areas the RP attained some achievements.

There is clearly a need for better civic and electoral education of Roma, argued this participant. In the last election Roma cast over 100,000 invalid votes, and a similar number voted for mainstream parties. There are currently 150 elected Romani councilors in municipal councils—this shows that electoral education brings results. The Roma Party also contributed to the adoption of several pieces of legislation important to the Romani minority, he said, including the law creating the National Council for Combating Discrimination. The party is currently involved in work on the draft law on national minorities. Last but not least, he added, it also succeeded in establishing institutions for Roma such as the National Agency for Roma, and ensured the greater participation of Romani representatives in state administration, whether at the level of ministries or of prefectures.

Other Romani participants from Romania disagreed with the views presented by this speaker. Some pointed out that the Roma Party has won elections with a smaller number of votes than before because Romani voters no longer trust it. Some questioned the long-term choice made by the Roma Party to associate itself with PSD. Others charged that the party failed to unite Romani organizations in Romania. In their view, the governmental Roma Strategy was a collaborative effort of many Romani organizations, and not the exclusive achievement of the Roma Party. Regardless of which party is in power, the strategy needs to be implemented simply because improvement in the situation of Roma is a requirement for Romania's EU accession, they said.

A Romani political leader from Macedonia brought up the recent municipal elections in the Shuto Orizari municipality of Skopje, and argued that a potentially dangerous situation has developed there as a result of his party's electoral loss. The municipal council of Shuto Orizari, a predominantly Romani municipal district of Skopje (approximately 80% Romani), is now dominated by Albanians, who are in minority there (roughly 20%). He warned against the possible

replication of such situations in other countries where Roma form highly concentrated communities. This participant argued that the Albanian minority managed to win in elections not because of the failure of the Romani leadership, but through irregularities, which were documented. He reported that he raised objections to this in Macedonia's parliament, arguing that a minority cannot be in control of a majority, and furthermore that the elections in Shuto Orizari were undemocratic. The efforts of the Albanians to be in control in Shuto Orizari have created a crisis in the Romani community, he said. In his view Roma must respond to this challenge with stronger political mobilization. According to him, the Romani civil sector has exhausted its potential and cannot go further. Roma now need to get involved in politics, form parties, take part in elections, and increase their representation in all levels of government, he argued. The Roma's aspirations are growing—they no longer want to be merely objects of policy, but rather active subjects in policymaking, and the crisis situation in Shuto Orizari calls attention to this fact.

A different participant pointed out that Romani leaders usually discuss relations between the Romani community and the majority, and pay less attention to the dominant minorities in their societies. In his view, these minorities (for example, Hungarians in Romania, or Albanians in the Western Balkans) in fact set the stage for minority politics. In relation to them, Romani minorities appear as a kind of annex, since these minorities have well defined agendas and are significant political players. The Roma might eventually benefit from this, but they are definitely not in a position of strength in this situation.

According to this participant, the Romani movement passed through a period of "romanticism," in the early 1990s, when leaders spoke about one nation, with one set of interests. Now the Romani community is becoming more complex and differentiated in terms of its interests and voting preferences. Romani politicians have to take this into account, and develop political platforms that reflect mainstream ideologies, such as left or right political orientations, social democratic, liberal, or Christian democratic values. Roma must come up with clear and strategic choices for the best ways to foster political mobilization, that is, whether to join with mainstream parties for elections or to compete with their own Romani party lists. They need to have better strategies on how to gain the trust of Romani voters, and they

also must take the responsibility for electoral losses. They might also consider how to cooperate fruitfully with stronger minorities, he said.

This debate demonstrated that Romani leaders continue to be divided on these issues. While some were in favor of greater Romani participation in the mainstream political life of their countries, noting that Roma are in fact joining a variety of mainstream parties with increasing frequency, many participants opposed this development. In the view of a Hungarian Romani representative at the roundtable, Roma should not affiliate themselves with any political party's ideology. To the contrary, argued this participant, it is in the interest of Roma to have a consensus among all mainstream parties to promote a coherent policy for Romani communities. This speaker, however, did not explain how such a consensus can be reached or ensured. He pointed to the dilemma facing Roma in mainstream parties, of being forced to follow the party's policies, which may not necessarily reflect the interests of the Romani community.

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For a Romani member of parliament from Romania, however, it was clear that Roma must preserve the capacity to negotiate Roma-related policies with any government, and, he said, for this reason the Roma Party struggled to have the National Roma Agency established. This capacity must be supported and guaranteed by a strong bloc of Romani voters, and this is why the electoral education of Roma needs to be continued. Roma also need to seek stronger representation at the local level, he said. In the view of this participant, it is clear that Roma can join the European Parliament only as members of mainstream parties. To achieve this, Roma must begin political engagement at the level of national politics, and affiliate themselves with strong mainstream parties.

The chair of the roundtable reminded participants that with few exceptions those who have entered national parliaments have done so from mainstream party lists. He argued that this might be the best way to ensure Romani representation in national parliaments. Those who gained parliamentary seats are assets for Romani interests, and shall

be supported and used to promote these interests, he said. Roma must learn party politics, he told the participants. He mentioned that ambiguities also surround Roma who join governments, as they sometimes face conflicting loyalties, but the challenge is to decide whether Roma want to be in charge or let others do the job.

## **ROMA POLICY: CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTATION**

According to a participant from Slovakia, the problems of Romani communities have been recognized and identified, and strategies and action plans to deal with them are in place. This part of the work has been done, she said. At present, the challenge is to implement these policies, and for this Roma must use all available instruments, including political ones. If Roma do not use them they will lose.

A similar view was expressed by the chair of the meeting. It is fair to acknowledge, he said, that despite the many programs and initiatives devoted to the Roma in Europe, change has been slow and results have been less than anticipated. Criticism of these initiatives and their results is deepening, as is frustration in Romani communities. The expectations and demands of the Roma, heightened by the profusion of Roma-oriented programs and initiatives (all of which consume funds), are clashing with the hopes for quick policy implementation. At the same time, implementation of Roma-oriented policies often suffers due to a lack of sufficient will on behalf of governing authorities, ineffective management, poor coordination, the low capacity of Romani partners, and, most profoundly, from insufficient funding. To date, the implementation of Roma policy is burdened with all of these problems, and this is true especially for the post-communist countries that rely on funding from foreign donors for such efforts.

Another reason efforts to substantially improve the situation of Romani communities have failed, argued this speaker, can be found in the fundamental tension between the affirmative, rights-based approach that is applied in a majority of initiatives for Roma, and the realities of the ongoing transition in Central and Southeast Europe. These realities involve a sharp reduction of state-sponsored social welfare provisions, economic liberalization, government decentralization, and privatization of state controlled property.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore,

with a growing number of people experiencing extreme economic hardship in many parts of the region, local authorities hesitate to embrace a policy of special measures for the Romani community, which could generate a backlash among the majority of voters.<sup>20</sup> Authorities are therefore caught in a dilemma, between the principle of non-discrimination on the one hand, and targeted Roma policies to reduce inequality on the other. This tension is particularly visible at the local level, where authorities

are gaining an increasingly prominent role in carrying out policies, but at the same time face a shortage of resources and also must be attentive to their constituencies. As a result, many Romani communities are in a highly unfavorable situation: dealing with Romani issues is more a task of the local civil sector (Romani and/or non-Romani), supported with foreign funds, than it is of local administrations; where there is no such civil agent, the Roma's concerns and needs are simply ignored.

Many Romani communities, he continued, remain passive, isolated, badly organized and uninformed. They have limited access to decision makers, and have few open channels of communication with the public administration. State Roma-related programs remain dormant in some countries, whereas the programs of international organizations are typically ineffectual or less than fully operational (for example, the Decade of Roma Inclusion). In addition, many Roma-related policies, when it comes to implementation, tend to be project-oriented, favoring small scale intervention by the civil sector rather than policy measures realized by local and state authorities.

The experiences of Roma in government office, though sometimes bitter, nevertheless show that working within governing structures is an opportunity to influence policy outcomes that should not be missed. A participant who works in the Macedonian government said that being a Rom in state office means constantly striking a balance

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between the expectations of Roma and the demands and guidelines of the government. Taking her job caused a profound change in many relationships, said this participant: she is no longer seen as a Rom, but as state official to be blamed for everything. A similar experience was reported by a participant who is a state official in Slovakia. This speaker described how, though she has held government office for four years, she has often been in opposition to the government's policies (as she was during the Romani riots in Eastern Slovakia in 2004). Regrettably, she said, in the aftermath of these riots she alone continued to struggle with the government for something positive for Roma. Instead of support, she claimed, she has been charged with misuse of funds by some Romani organizations. Among Romani organizations, only the Dzeno Foundation from the Czech Republic came to her defense. She argued that, in this case, Romani organizations failed to form a united platform for negotiations with the government.

Several participants argued that resolving the Roma's problems requires greater engagement of national and local authorities. In their view, it is a question of political will, and sufficient resources. According to a Hungarian Romani representative, European programs are ineffective because resources are diluted before they can reach their target communities. This participant asserted that the Hungarian experience demonstrates that governments must take the lead to get tangible results and ensure that finances reach local communities. He argued that the role of international organizations (including Romani organizations) in policy implementation is secondary. A participant from Slovakia similarly posed the question of whether there is a need for a new international Romani organization. If the answer is yes, she said, what will it be for? Will it have the ability to influence Roma policy at the national level?

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN ROMA AND TRAVELLERS FORUM?

Two representatives of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) addressed the question of what role this international Romani organization can play in the current situation. They offered different visions of the duties and role of their organization.

One asserted that the Forum can become a serious actor in Romani politics, and that those taking part in it will become democratically legitimate representatives of the Romani community—a first in the history of Roma in Europe. In the view of this participant, at the beginning the Forum may not consist of the most educated elite, but it will be a link to the lowest, grassroots level of Romani leadership, she said. The Forum will have to debate a range of issues pertaining to the future, as well as questions of Romani culture and identity, i.e., what is good or bad in Romani traditions, and what should be criticized or changed. The Forum should take on issues that are controversial among various Romani groups, such as unemployment, and ways of dealing with it in Western Europe (where a significant number of Romani groups maintain their traveling way of life and are not interested in seeking regular jobs), the practice of early marriage, and girls who are not permitted to attend school. This participant argued that tackling such issues will establish the Forum's leadership role in shaping policies that affect the Roma's future. Otherwise, she said, the Forum will contribute nothing to changing inter-community relations and will maintain the barriers that enforce separation between the world of Roma and that of others.

***The Forum will have to debate a range of issues pertaining to the future, as well as questions of Romani culture and identity.***

This speaker observed that most Roma-related initiatives and programs target Romani communities in the eastern part of Europe or the former communist countries, while the Roma in Western Europe are ignored. These Roma and Traveller communities also live in deplorable conditions, and are barely tolerated. Both the international community and Romani activists appear to care less about Roma in the west, or perhaps these communities have simply been forgotten, she said. This unbalanced focus must be changed. She argued that

attention and resources should also be directed to Western Europe and Romani minorities there. A participant from Romania pointed out that Romani leaders, in fact, are used to talking about Romani problems in global terms, though different Romani communities in both parts of Europe have different needs and require different kinds of intervention.

How Romani organizations can induce change in Romani culture and identity, in the view of another participant, poses a hard but important question for debate by Roma. The notion of integration of Roma is used in all international and governmental Roma-related policies. However, there is little debate about what kind of integration these policies imply, whether society at large and Romani minorities are ready for integration, or what it will cost them. Similarly, the question of which Romani cultural traditions help or hamper integration should be discussed.

The interim President of the ERTF expressed a different view. He first stated that PER's effort to gather Romani representatives and openly debate Romani issues is very useful. This is exactly what the Forum should do, he said: raise and debate hard questions among Roma themselves. However, he opposed putting such issues as how Roma live and exercise their traditions on the agenda of the Forum.

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The mandate of Romani organizations is not to change people's cultures or traditions, he asserted. The Forum is not a government, and even a government cannot do that, he said. He warned against generalizations, and focusing on issues that might be true for some small Romani communities (such as issues of Romani girls and education, early marriages, or Roma who are not interested in seeking regular jobs), as something non-Roma eagerly pick up and take as grounds for blaming Roma for their problems or as support for negative stereotypes.

He pointed out that the Romani movement needs democratization of its organizations and communities, and that the Forum is standing on a firm democratic foundation. Those who advocated for the creation of the Forum started a process that might be painful to many, such as the International Romani Union (IRU) and the Roma National Congress (RNC), since they will have to give up some of their power. However, Roma will gain new strength, he said, based on a new legitimacy that Romani organizations have never had. The Forum will include Romani representatives from all of Europe, he told participants, and their voice will be heard.

There are currently those who speak in the name of Roma in various international intergovernmental organizations, said this speaker, and there are international organizations where there are no Roma. If expert groups or bodies set up to deal with Romani problems are not in partnership with the Forum, he declared, they will be its competitors. Organizations and bodies that affect Roma policy must be open to Romani representation, he stated. Similarly, governments will have to realize that there is a new partner for them. They will have to realize that they cannot follow their Roma policy as in the past without receiving the Forum's opinion. The Forum will need to give a signal to governments that a solution to all problems of Roma can be found on the basis of partnership and compromise. Roma have reached a point at which things can turn into success or failure, he observed, and this applies to other non-territorial minorities as well. The Roma have shown others the way. If the Roma succeed, they will set an example for others to follow; if they fail, he warned, it will cause destabilization in Europe.

According to this participant, the problems of Roma are not as described in numerous documents and reports. Roma have been killed, thousands of Roma from Kosovo are still displaced, and in every country Roma live in misery, facing discrimination and expulsion. Racism is on the rise and this is a problem throughout Europe. The Romani leaders who were in the Romani movement from the beginning realized that they cannot resolve these problems until Roma unite their strengths. This is the purpose of the Forum, he said. Roma need to define exactly what they want, and what position Romani minorities should have in the new Europe. A solution will come when Roma understand that the source of all their ills is anti-Gypsyism, he

said. The Forum's focus will be discrimination and anti-Gypsyism and how to break it. Roma may differ in many respects, but they have one interest: ending anti-Gypsyism. The other challenge facing Roma is to build strength as a minority that is pan-European, transnational and non-territorial.

A representative of the IRU remarked that it was the IRU that came up with the vision of the Romani Nation in 2000, established a Roma Parliament as its voice, and lobbied for its recognition at the Council of Europe. Later, a parallel proposal to that of Finnish President Tarja Halonen to set up the Roma and Travellers Forum gained ground, and was eventually accepted by the Council of Europe. The IRU supported this initiative, despite the fact that as a result it lost its previous position and power as the voice of the Romani Nation. This representative of the IRU stated, however, that it believes the Forum will serve Romani interests well. Most of the participants in the roundtable expressed similar views: they believe the establishment of the Forum is a historic event and hope it will become a major player in the formulation of Roma policy. Some of the participants said they would withhold criticism of the Forum, offering it a "grace period" until its actions as a fully legitimate body can be fairly judged.

## **ROMA AS ACTORS IN THE CREATION OF ROMA POLICY**

The participants in the roundtable took up a number of questions about the Roma as actors in the formulation of Roma-related policy. What chances do Roma have to influence its formulation and implementation, and at what level? Who is best positioned to do this, the Romani political elite and civil society organizations, or the newly established ERTF? What is the strongest asset on the side of the Roma in this endeavor, the scale of the problems Roma face and their potential for appeal to policymakers (such as the issue of Romani refugees and migrants, Romani poverty and social exclusion, and anti-Gypsyism), or the sheer social and demographic realities of the Romani population in Europe?

Participants agreed that the Romani political elite is still nascent and small in number. Romani leaders are divided on what direction they should take to enlarge this elite, and to politically mobilize Romani

communities. Similarly, regarding Romani civil society, some participants expressed their dedication to continuing to work on empowering Romani communities by developing civil society capacity, while others saw this path as already exhausted. On the question of the ERTF, many participants said that it is too early to say how effective this new international NGO will be in bringing Roma together and forging unity among them. A participant from the Czech Republic posed the basic question of why Roma need unity. Is this something coming from within Romani communities, as an internal need, or something imposed on Roma by others, whether the international community or national governments? According to this speaker, in the Czech Republic there were non-Romani authorities who asked Roma to speak with one voice and to be united so they could devise solutions to Romani problems. Roma accordingly organized themselves and worked together with the authorities on a Roma strategy. Finally, however, it appeared that there were no state resources available for the strategy's implementation.

Furthermore, according to this participant, forging unity might be problematic due to the fact that Roma are no longer indifferent to political ideologies—they are joining or voting for even extreme right wing or communist parties.

***If for others geography makes history and determines politics, Roma seem to believe that demography and extreme poverty will be decisive for them.***

Romani communities have undergone a process of differentiation in this regard, he said, similar to the "sub-ethnic" differentiation of identity as in the cases of Ashkalia and Egyptians.

Other participants raised the question of whether the problems of Romani migration in fact help put Romani issues on the international agenda. Some participants argued that much of what has been achieved since the beginning of the 1990s was triggered by the issues of Romani migrants and refugees. If there were no Romani migrants and refugees from the former Yugoslavia and Romania, said one, no international organization would pay attention to the Roma's cause. These issues give Roma policy great significance in the West, particularly the problems of Kosovo's Romani/RAE (Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian) refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The issue of Romani migration elicited a range of comments at the roundtable. Some participants discussed this question as an issue of freedom of movement, arguing that the policies of the EU and some member states in this sphere discriminate against Roma. The policies of France, the UK and other western countries were mentioned as being anti-immigrant and anti-Roma. Others argued, however, that it is unclear how much longer the issue of Romani migrants and refugees can be an important factor for Roma policy. With the EU enlargement process progressing, argued these participants, the issue of Romani migrants will change: Roma, as citizens of a common European space, will be entitled to free movement, just as Roma from Hungary, Slovakia and Poland are now.

Romani leaders lack a clear position on the question of Kosovo's Romani/RAE refugees, said another participant, though the resolution of Kosovo's status might at the same time resolve the issue of Kosovo's refugees and IDPs, at least regarding their legal position. The very concept of "RAE" is under dispute, he added; the Ashkali and Egyptians claim a different identity from that of Roma, and object to being associated with the Roma. In fact, there are signs that these communities would like to go different ways: they accuse Roma of controlling positions, influence and resources.

Romani leaders, asserted another participant, count on demographics and the Roma's extreme poverty to put their issues on the international agenda. Roma can also be accused of manipulating numbers to make their case, claiming that Roma are the biggest ethnic minority in Europe, he said. He went on to assert that if for others geography makes history and determines politics, Roma seem to believe that demography and extreme poverty will be decisive for them. He cautioned against this view, however. What the Roma may believe to be their strength, others may see as a threat, wondering how states can possibly manage their problems given the constraints of limited resources. For example, Serbian authorities don't want to register Kosovo's Romani refugees and IDP's for the simple reason that they don't want to be burdened with additional welfare costs, stated this participant. This speaker was critical of Romani activists who contribute to maintaining stereotypes in the public imagination, such as those of Roma being overwhelmingly poor, suffering from unemployment, being discriminated against in access to jobs, and, in general, always being a victim. All of these might not always be the case for

some Roma groups or communities, but Roma leaders tend to generalize easily. This participant called upon Romani leaders to be more responsible in what they say.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PRIORITIES

There were evident links between the organizational backgrounds or current affiliations of participants and the future priorities that they described for Roma policy. This tendency was particularly notable among representatives of the ERTF and also among Romani politicians, such as Romani members of parliament or government officials. However, no "big ideas" or visions were outlined. In the absence of these, anti-Gypsyism emerged as one important theme.

In general, participants were more focused on "small" but important objectives for the future. The way participants outlined their future priorities and the language they used to do so appeared to be a sign of the increasing maturity of Romani leaders, as both were congruent with the concepts and current trends in mainstream human and minority rights discourse. This also reflected a growing awareness among Romani leaders of the multiplicity of international standards, national laws, programs and policies (including those of the EU), to which Roma can turn to back their claims.

It was also surprising that among the priorities outlined there were few new objectives. Most objectives that were mentioned had long been targeted by the Romani movement.

Some participants proposed differentiating between a short list of immediate priorities and a more general, long-term list. Among the former were mentioned the following issues: the question of the electoral crisis in Shuto Orizari, and of how to deal with such cases in the future; the issue of electoral coalitions in forthcoming elections in several countries, and the prospects of Romani parties for benefiting from such coalitions; and the problems of Romani refugees and IDPs from Kosovo. It was also suggested that Roma need to analyze the state's interests in Romani issues, and combine their interests with those of the state in areas where governments might be keen to support Roma. Several participants argued that much of what has been accomplished in the sphere of Roma policy was due to a state's particular interest in Roma issues.

Some participants had well-defined lists of future priorities, both at national and international levels. According to a Romani member of parliament from Romania, five priorities are at the top of his country's Roma agenda: creating equal opportunities for Roma; bringing affirmative, proactive measures to Roma-related policies; preserving the Romani language and Romani culture; fostering the social and economic development of Romani communities, including improving housing and related infrastructure; and fighting anti-Romani intolerance and racism. Achieving these objectives, he said, requires the following conditions: political will on the part of central and local authorities; adequate legislation; state and European funding; and the harmonization of various programs and policies, such as those of governmental Roma strategies and the Decade of Roma Inclusion's action plans.

On the question of Roma policy and EU institutions, this participant saw as a priority the emergence of Roma as a political player whose voice will be heard and taken into consideration. For the time being, he said, this role can be taken by the ERTF. In his view, the status of Romani minorities within the EU should be clearly defined. A coherent Roma policy at the EU level should be developed and accepted by all Romani organizations in Europe, he told the participants. Roma should also seek access to the European Parliament through inclusion in mainstream parties.

Some of these priorities, commented several participants, are already well embedded in existing laws. Equality is inscribed in most constitutions as a basic principle, and countries have also been encouraged by the EU to adopt equality laws; some countries, such as Hungary, have done so recently. Proactive, affirmative measures are inscribed in some state Roma strategies or action plans. Anti-racism and the elimination of all forms of discrimination are principles contained in many constitutions. Similarly, European governments as well as international institutions are well aware of the danger of racism and discrimination, and the EU keeps these issues high on its agenda. International institutions, policies and resources targeting these issues are available to Roma as well. The preservation of national and ethnic minority languages and cultures are part and parcel of the so-called "positive rights" that the state is obliged to defend, and these are inscribed in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

and also in state minority laws. The social and economic development of Romani communities is the objective of national Roma strategies and the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Participants also mentioned the potential for using EU financial instruments to implement Roma-related programs and policies. Here, however, the debate revealed that Roma are still lacking knowledge of EU policies and financial instruments, especially the EU's Structural Funds and their potential use in Roma-related projects.

Combating racism and anti-Gypsyism was at the top of the general list of priorities outlined by participants. The position presented by representatives of the ERTF on this subject was, in general, supported by participants. As one of the Forum's representatives remarked, the Romani elite is still slow to react in cases of racist, anti-Romani incidents—something unthinkable for other minorities in Europe. Many participants said there is still a need for awareness-raising in this regard, since anti-Gypsyism is on the rise in present-day Europe. Roma need to start researching this phenomenon, how anti-Gypsyism is built up and how it impacts the situation of Roma, said participants. They have to raise the question of governmental responsibility for past and present anti-Romani policies and discrimination, and decide what must be done to eradicate this problem.

The issue of greater unity among Roma, a question that has been much debated internally since the Romani movement took shape in the 1970s, was placed similarly high on the agenda. The ERTF was presented (by its leadership) as a viable way to reach that goal. One participant remarked, however, that unity in the Romani movement involves a set of objectives defined by its elite for Romani communities, and does not necessarily imply unity in leadership and organization. In this context, a question arose as to which grounds are the best basis for forging unity among Roma. Is combating anti-Gypsyism alone sufficient? This was a challenging question for some participants, who pointed to the increasing differentiation among various groups of Roma (Ashkalia and Egyptians), and within Romani communities (the emergence of voting preferences for mainstream political parties).

Political mobilization and achieving direct access to policy- and decision-making bodies were set out as further priorities for Roma. These

priorities were supported by Romani politicians and state officials at the roundtable. Improving the skills and capacities of Roma, continuing civic-electoral education of Romani communities, and seeking the inclusion of Roma in various mainstream parties were practices that participants encouraged. In the view of some participants, joining mainstream parties is the only viable way for Romani minorities to enter elected bodies and become political stakeholders in national politics. A look at the numbers of Romani voters and past experiences in elections shows that Romani political parties by themselves are unsuccessful in gaining larger representation of Roma in elected bodies, argued some participants.

The concept of "mainstreaming," or incorporating Romani issues into broader, mainstream social policy rather than keeping them in a separate domain devoted exclusively to Roma, has long been central to Roma policy formulation. Many participants (especially older activists) expressed satisfaction that their efforts for more than a decade to bring Romani concerns to the highest levels of international and national political fora have brought results. New steps were taken in this direction with the elaboration of governmental policies for Romani minorities and the institutionalization of these policies, i.e., establishing Roma offices or tasking other ministries with implementing Roma programs. What is missing, several participants pointed out, is strong political backing for mainstreaming efforts, either by Roma themselves or by dominant political forces. Roma remain a weak political force at the level of national politics, with little ability to influence, for example, the budgetary decisions of policymakers. For this reason, many participants argued, governmental Roma policies often lack sufficient funding for effective implementation.

Roundtable participants who were in government administration identified implementation of policies and programs as a top priority. These participants asserted that the period of designing programs has come to a close, and that a new implementation phase has begun. After more than a decade of efforts, it is clear that achieving the common goal of all programs and initiatives—improving the situation of Romani communities in concrete and measurable ways—will remain out of reach without the real involvement not only of central government authorities, but also of regional and local ones acting in partnership with Romani communities. Some participants saw this state of

affairs as a failure of the Romani movement, since little has been invested in strengthening local-level Romani organizations and leadership. The policies and initiatives of governments and international organizations need to be adapted to the local context, and tailored to the specific needs of regional and local communities, said several participants.

Another point made at the roundtable was that the problems of Roma should be approached as a "package," since only a comprehensive solution will prove effective. Additionally, said other participants, the role of regional and local authorities in dealing with Romani issues will, with decentralization, only increase, and they will likely be essential in changing the living conditions of Romani communities. More attention should be paid to introducing institutional or systemic changes to address Romani issues, argued participants, to ensure more effective implementation of Roma-related programs and initiatives.

The debate at the roundtable also indicated the presence of two different but connected fields of priorities in Roma policy: international and national/local priorities. This distinction has clearly been shaped by the establishment of the ERTF. It is too early to say what the interplay between the two will be, but it should be noted that there is increasing interest among national and local Romani politicians in playing a role in international Romani politics through the ERTF.

The inclusion of Roma in managerial positions in a variety of bodies dealing with Romani issues and that determine Roma policy emerged as another objective during the roundtable. This appeared to be a new item on the list of priorities. For some participants, achieving this is part of the effort to end centuries of "patronizing" politics; if the slogan "for Roma by Roma" is to be fulfilled, Roma need to be employed in various structures in managerial positions.

Finally, a representative of PER proposed putting among priorities the creation of a Romani "think tank," a group of Romani intellectuals to draft opinions and policy recommendations, whose position would be authoritative and respected by institutions and policymakers. In the view of this participant, Roma need not only bodies like the ERTF, but also Romani opinion makers who will be able to come up with their own analyses, expert opinions and policy papers. The Romani movement is currently missing such a group of well educated

professionals, who are able to work as a team and produce opinions to stimulate Roma policy development.

To conclude the roundtable, the president of PER strongly emphasized that Roma need to become real and indispensable stakeholders in both national and international Roma policy formulation. While this is a legitimate goal, it comes with higher responsibility for Romani leaders. If Romani politicians want to be useful and do not want merely to follow others, they need to learn to anticipate the moves of other actors, whether governments or the international community. Competing with each other is by no means harmful to the Roma's interests, but at the same time Roma need to develop negotiating capacities, as this will increase their political power. Romani leaders need to maintain dialogue among themselves but also with governments. Romani politicians have the ability to make a real difference, she said, and to bring tangible solutions to the problems of their communities.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See *Leadership, Representation, and the Status of the Roma*, PER Report, Princeton, 2001.
- <sup>2</sup> See *Roma and the Question of Self-Determination: Fiction and Reality*, PER Report, Princeton, 2003.
- <sup>3</sup> PER has organized two groundbreaking regional meetings of Roma leaders and governments, the first in Stupava, Czechoslovakia in 1992, and the next in Snagov, Romania in 1993. See *The Romanies in Central and Eastern Europe: Illusions and Reality*, PER Report, Princeton, 1992 and *Countering Anti-Roma Violence in Eastern Europe: The Snagov Conference and Related Efforts*, PER Report, Princeton, 1994.
- <sup>4</sup> A number of papers devoted to this topic can be found in *Between the Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. W. Guy, Ed., University of Hertfordshire, 2001.
- <sup>5</sup> See, for example, P. Tamas, "Roma Politics in Central Europe," *The Analyst: Central East European Review*, Budapest, Volume 1, No. 1, June 2005.
- <sup>6</sup> See the statement of M. Weller in *Filling the Frame: Five Years of Monitoring the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, Council of Europe Publishing, 2004, pp. 69-71.
- <sup>7</sup> The Decade of Roma Inclusion was proposed at a regional conference in Budapest, which took place on June 29-July 1, 2003, and was hosted by the Hungarian Government. For more information, see "Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future. A Summary of Policy Discussions and Conference Proceedings," The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2004.
- <sup>8</sup> M. A. Orenstein, U. Ozkaleli, "Europe's Roma Minority and the Culture of Globalization," a paper presented at the workshop Cultural Politics of Globalization and Community in East Central Europe, organized by the University of Michigan Center for Russian and East European Studies, May 12-15, 2005, Budapest.
- <sup>9</sup> The Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues was established in Warsaw in 1994, as a small unit within the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE. Later, in 1999, the post of Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues was created. The Coordinator for the Council of Europe's Activities on Roma/Travellers was nominated in 1994 and, a year later, the Specialist Group on Roma/Travellers was established as an advisory group to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.
- <sup>10</sup> The ERTF was formally established in December 2005, when the first assembly of members of the Forum gathered and established its powers. For more on its origin see: *Roma and the Question of Self-Determination: Fiction and Reality*, PER Report, Princeton, 2003.

- <sup>11</sup> In this regard the view of the Reflection Group on Long-Term Implications of EU Enlargement, under the chairmanship of Giuliano Amato still holds validity. As early as 1998 the Group claimed that “the EU will find it hard to maintain its agnostic stance on minority rights vis-à-vis its member states.” The Group enumerated three main factors that may challenge this stance: 1) with enlargement new EU member states will bring with them minority problems of direct concern to the EU; 2) increased migration both from new and poorer member states and from third countries will accentuate the differentiation between these two groups and will necessitate regulation on the status of non-EU minority groups; and 3) the special situation of the Roma, which “points to a case for direct EU involvement where a minority issue transcends the borders of member states, and where an extremely marginalized minority lacks the resources to formulate and assert its rights effectively.” See “Minority Rights and EU Enlargement to the East. Report of the First Meeting of the Reflection Group on the Long Term Implications of EU Enlargement: the Nature of the New Border,” European University Institute, RSC Policy Paper No. 98/5.
- <sup>12</sup> G. Sasse, “Minority Rights and EU Enlargement: Normative Overstretch or Effective Conditionality?” in *Minority Protection and the Enlarged European Union: the Way Forward*, G. N. Toggenburg, Ed., Open Society Institute Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Budapest, 2004, p. 66.
- <sup>13</sup> See “Open Letter to the Commissioners’ Group on Fundamental Rights, Anti-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities with the Occasion of 8th of April the International Roma Day Issues,” European Roma Information Office (ERIO) press release, April 10, 2005.
- <sup>14</sup> For example, this has long been the position of the Czech Republic, which has called for a “European” approach to Romani issues. For more see: *Leadership, Representation and the Status of the Roma*, PER Report, Princeton, 2001, p.37. Also, G. T. Toggenburg maintains that: “The poverty and segregation of the Roma are a phenomenon that require an EU-born reply,” (G. T. Toggenburg, “Minority Protection in a Supranational Context: Limits and Opportunities,” in *Minority Protection and Enlarged European Union*, op. cit. p. 20.) The EU Network of Independent Experts on Fundamental Rights, in its first “Report on the Situation of Fundamental Rights in the European Union for 2002,” devoted a chapter to the Roma. It is worth noting here that the Network recommended adopting the Roma Integration Directive. (The full report is available at [http://europe.eu.int/comm/justice\\_home/cfr\\_cdf/doc/rapport\\_2002\\_en.pdf](http://europe.eu.int/comm/justice_home/cfr_cdf/doc/rapport_2002_en.pdf).) See also the report: “The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union,” European Commission Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs, Unit D3, Luxemburg, 2004 (available at [http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/publications/2005/ke6204389\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/publications/2005/ke6204389_en.html).)

- <sup>15</sup> For more on their plans in the EP see their interview with the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) “The only hope for the European Roma is the European Union,” in *Equal Voices*, EUMC, Issue 16, June 2005, pp. 11-13.
- <sup>16</sup> For more information, see *Roma and EU Accession: Elected and Appointed Romani Representatives in an Enlarged Europe*, PER Report, Princeton 2004; also, E. Sobotka, “Targeting and mainstreaming the integration of Roma at the EU and European level,” in *Equal Voices*, EUMC, Issue 16, June 2005, pp. 4 -10.
- <sup>17</sup> See: E. Sobotka, “Targeting and mainstreaming the integration of Roma at the EU and European level,” in *Equal Voices*, op. cit., pp. 4 -10.
- <sup>18</sup> For more on the Czech Memorandum of Understanding, see *Leadership, Representation and the Status of the Roma*, PER Report, op. cit., pp. 33-43.
- <sup>19</sup> A vivid example of this tension is provided by the growing problem of Romani evictions: with the privatization of land and public utilities, Roma increasingly find themselves in debt due to unpaid utility bills, or residing in flats or on land that has become the property of new owners. In such cases the state has few options but to execute the law. At the same time, many Roma initiatives have targeted housing as a key concern, and local authorities are called upon to prevent evictions or find suitable alternative housing for Romani families.
- <sup>20</sup> Such policies may also be construed as unconstitutional: in October 2005 Slovakia’s Constitutional Court banned positive discrimination for members of ethnic or minority groups.

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

(English alphabetical order)

### Czech Republic

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